

**The Triune Provider**  
**Kenneth F. Gavel**



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## PREFACE

[I]t is a risky business to see history as the location of God's work, and both the Jewish people and the church have been hurt by false readings of its signs. Yet to reject this risk is to close ourselves to any living relationship to the God of this world. If God is a living God, then we must accept the risk of living with Him and under Him, *hic et nunc*.<sup>1</sup>

A doctrine of providence seeks to supply a conceptual model of God's relation to the world. As the meeting place for the church's doctrine of God and its understanding of the nature of the world, it becomes a key focal point for dealing with a host of problems in explicating who God is and how God cares for the world.

Critical changes in worldview have effected radical changes in the way many theologians understand the Christian doctrines of God and providence. When Langdon Gilkey, for example, put into words the confusion implicit in the 'God Who Acts' theology, he also helped to seal the fate of the traditional understanding of providence.<sup>2</sup> The very notion of God "acting" had become associated with direct, and sometimes miraculous intervention, a thought ruled out of court by the modern scientific view of the universe as a closed system of natural causes. God could no longer be said to "act" in the universe, either in the non-human world or in humans, beyond a general and immanent influence.

Contemporaneous with the recognition of the problems with a doctrine of providence which resulted in its eclipse, several theologians began to alert the

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<sup>1</sup>Paul M. van Buren, A Theology of the Jewish Christian Reality. Part 1: Discerning the Way (Toronto, Can.: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, Limited; New York, NY: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., 1980; Harper and Row paperback edition, 1987), 65; cf. *ibid.*, 95, 110-119.

<sup>2</sup>Langdon Gilkey, 'Cosmology, Ontology, and the Travail of Biblical Language,' The Journal of Religion 41 (1961): 194-205.

theological community to the long-standing neglect of the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>3</sup> These two doctrines had each arrived at this point by slightly different routes, but the same Enlightenment, Modernist and Post-modern influences have played a role in the demise of both.<sup>4</sup> The point of relevance in asking about the connections between the two doctrines derives from the close connection between one's doctrine of providence and one's doctrine of God.<sup>5</sup> This is not a neutral issue, since the choice made by a theologian about a doctrine of God can either weaken, or enrich, his or her retrieval of providence. Since for orthodox Christian theology God has been understood as triune, Karl Barth asked whether a doctrine of providence, in order to be Christian, should not also be explicitly trinitarian.<sup>6</sup> As an intrinsic aspect of one's view of providence, therefore, this thesis will ask of each author which model of the Christian God they are associating with their doctrine of providence.

Until traditional views of providence lost credibility, the doctrine had served in dogmatic and systematic theologies as the locus of a wide range of issues. Included among them were, the doctrine of God, divine action, divine foreknowledge and sovereignty, theological determinism, election, predestination, salvation, theology of history, eschatology, hope, human free will, prayer, miracles, and theodicy.<sup>7</sup> Stated minimally, a doctrine of providence was essentially an attempt to

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<sup>3</sup>Karl Barth (cf. his The Doctrine of the Word of God, vol. 1, pt. 1, trans. G. T. Thomson, Church Dogmatics [Edinburgh, UK: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1936] and Karl Rahner (The Trinity, trans. Joseph Donceel [Kent, UK: Burns and Oates, 1970]) have played leading roles in this project. Cf. also Claude Welch's assessment of the status of the Trinity doctrine (In This Name: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Contemporary Theology [New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952]) at a time which corresponds to Gilkey's assessment of the state of providence ('The Concept of Providence in Contemporary Theology,' The Journal of Religion 43, no. 3 [July 1963]: 171-192). Cf. also James Mackey, The Christian Experience of God as Trinity (London, UK: SCM Press Ltd., 1983), esp. chaps. 8-14; and William Placher, The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking about God Went Wrong (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), chap. 10.

<sup>4</sup>While a full historical documentation of these developments is beyond the scope and purpose of this thesis, Chapter One will look at a few anecdotal sources of evidence which seem to support this conclusion.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. Brian Hebblethwaite and Edward Henderson, 'Introduction,' in Divine Action: Studies Inspired by the Philosophical Theology of Austin Farrer, eds. B. Hebblethwaite, and E. Henderson (Edinburgh, UK: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1990), 1.

<sup>6</sup>Karl Barth, The Doctrine of Creation, vol. 3, pt. 3, trans. G. W. Bromiley and R. J. Ehrlich, Church Dogmatics (Edinburgh, UK: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1960), 30-56.

<sup>7</sup>Cf. similar lists by Edward Farley, review of Reaping the Whirlwind: A Christian Interpretation of History, by Langdon Gilkey, in Religious Studies Review 4, no. 4 (October 1978),

provide a religious structure of meaning for human experience of life as a sequence of events, that is, as history. For Christians, this structure of meaning was underwritten by the creator God of the Bible, usually understood as giving the world existence, maintaining it in being, and governing its affairs with the aim of directing it to a final consummation. God's direct and personal oversight and direction of human history were understood to be the source of its meaning and ultimate hope. Thus, this thesis will follow the themes of history, meaning, and hope as they are addressed by the models of providence reviewed in Chapters Two, Three and Four.

The thesis will unfold according to the following structure. Chapter One will highlight several of the main contributing factors in the loss of credibility of older forms of doctrines of providence. It will quickly become evident that older views of providence assumed a certain understanding of the God of Christian Theism which has come under heavy criticism. Subsequent chapters will look at how a few contemporary theologians have responded to the problems with traditional views of providence, noting also the model of the Christian God each chooses to associate with providence.

A central claim of this thesis is that in the past many construals of providence have been based upon an inadequate view of the Christian God (that is, God as a monadic Substance or Subject). If the richness and complexity of the scriptural portrayal of God's dynamic nature and providential relationship to the created order are to be given a significant voice,<sup>8</sup> it will need to reflect the roles of Father, Son and Spirit in God's ongoing care of the world.

Chapters Two through Four will review six models of providence with the intent of capturing key ideas in these models which serve to highlight the heuristic value of their perspectives, and which in turn establish an agenda for further reconstruction. Exhaustive analyses of these models lies outside the scope of this thesis and, therefore, it will not be able to engage all the questions about an author's overarching theological model as these influence his or her doctrine of providence.

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233; and Owen C. Thomas and Ellen K. Wondra (*Introduction to Theology*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. [Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2002], 122).

<sup>8</sup>Cf. Patrick Miller, 'Revisiting the God Who Acts,' *Theology Today* vol. 54, n. 1 (April, 1997), 3. Cf. Colin Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity*, The 1992 Bampton Lectures (New York, NY; Melbourne, Australia; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 181-84.



Chapter Two of the thesis will review models of providence by two theologians who do not hold to a doctrine of the Trinity, but who address key problems with traditional versions of providence (Maurice Wiles and Langdon Gilkey). Chapter Three will look at providence as treated by two trinitarian theologians, but who do not apply a doctrine of the Trinity to providence in a systematic manner (Paul Helm and John Sanders). Reasons for this are explored, and illustrative options are presented as suggestions for ways one might make this connection.

Chapter Four will review two models of the doctrine of providence by theologians who treat a doctrine of the Trinity as the fundamental grammar of the doctrine of God and who explicitly connect their doctrines of the Trinity to their doctrines of providence (Wolfhart Pannenberg and Jürgen Moltmann).

Finally, Chapter Five will summarise key ideas arising from previous chapters, noting the areas of commonality among the authors reviewed, as well as key differences. This summary constitutes an agenda for further work on a doctrine of providence, and a beginning outline is offered as a suggestion toward developing a trinitarian model of providence within the context of an overarching model of the Trinity-world relation conceived as a divine-human community.

This thesis is working with the concept of providence as treated in Christian theology. Although there should be an apologetical benefit from constructing a credible model of providence, apologetics is not the primary focus of the present treatment, but rather, this thesis attempts to list problems and possibilities for a Christian doctrine of providence for those who are already Christian theists.

While there is a great deal of variety among Christian theologians in their views about the nature of providence and about the nature of the Christian God, the authors reviewed in the following chapters assume this God is personal, at least in an analogous sense, and acts in, upon, or through the world.

I recognise the problems in continuing to use masculine titles or pronouns in referring to God without defending their continued use, but for the sake of avoiding cumbersome substitutes, I have elected to follow this convention and do not mean to imply thereby that the issue is unimportant.

The scope of this thesis precludes extensive treatment of several key issues associated with a doctrine of providence. Some of these will be noted in Chapter One, but one other limitation to be observed here involves treating providence only from the perspective of its application to humans. This is not to imply, however, that a comprehensive doctrine of providence should not also address God's care of all aspects of creation.



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Most importantly, all honour must go to our Lord Jesus Christ for granting grace and strength sufficient for the task.

## **ABSTRACT**

In an influential, mid-twentieth century article, Langdon Gilkey noted that traditional forms of a Christian doctrine of providence had suffered a serious loss of credibility. Karl Barth had argued earlier that, in spite of a failure by many theologians to link a doctrine of providence explicitly to a doctrine of the Trinity, if a doctrine of providence is to be Christian, it should also be trinitarian, since orthodox Christianity understands God to be triune. In view of these assessments, this thesis examines the doctrine of divine providence, and argues that many systematic formulations of it have failed to capture its specifically Christian, which is to say trinitarian, nature, but that when they do they provide a more adequate framework for the doctrine and the hope it offers.

Chapter One of this thesis will examine the present status of a doctrine of providence, noting especially those problems that have led to its demise. The thesis will focus on the question as to whether a doctrine of providence can still function as a framework of meaning for human history, and therefore as a source of hope for human endeavour. In view of the intrinsic link between a doctrine of God and a doctrine of providence, addressing problems with traditional forms of providence requires one to respond to contemporary critiques of Christian Classical Theism. This Chapter raises the question as to whether, in addressing problems with a Christian doctrine of providence, the doctrine can be credibly reconstructed within the framework of a trinitarian model of God. Criteria are then suggested by which to evaluate the Christian models of providence reviewed in subsequent chapters.

Chapter Two evaluates two Christian theologies of providence by theologians who are not trinitarian, but who address key problems with traditional versions of providence.

Chapter Three looks at two theologians who are trinitarian in theology, but who do not apply an explicitly trinitarian structure to their doctrines of providence.

Reasons for this are explored, and illustrative options are presented as suggestions for ways one might make this connection.

Chapter Four reviews two models of providence which are constructed with explicit connections to a relational model of the triune God.

Chapter Five summarises key ideas arising from previous chapters, noting the areas of commonality among the authors reviewed, as well as key differences. This summary constitutes an agenda for further work on a doctrine of providence, and a beginning outline is offered as a suggestion toward developing a trinitarian model of providence within the context of an overarching model of the Trinity-world relation conceived as a divine-human community.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **PROVIDENCE AND THE TRINITY TODAY**

In order to understand some of the key issues with which contemporary theologians struggle in constructing a credible doctrine of providence, the first section of this opening chapter will summarise a few of the factors which have led to the present shape of the discussion on providence. This survey will note, on the one hand, why for many Christians the doctrine has lost its significance, and on the other hand, record the renewed interest in the doctrine.

As noted in the Preface, since a doctrine of providence and a doctrine of God are closely related, and given that a doctrine of the Trinity has served as the orthodox doctrine of God for most in the Christian tradition, the second section of this chapter will briefly note a parallel and related eclipse and renewal of the Trinity in contemporary theology. The current context for both doctrines (providence and Trinity) seems to be one of rediscovery and reconstruction, and as such provides the background against which each of the authors considered here are working.

The final section of the chapter will outline the criteria of analysis to be used in succeeding chapters.

As an introductory survey, this chapter does not function as a definitive analysis of contemporary treatments of providence, but serves rather to highlight key issues that arise in current discussions of the doctrine. This will set the context for the discussion of providence by particular theologians reviewed in chapters Two through Four, as well as establish the framework for the positive proposals put forward in Chapter Five.

## THE STATE OF THE DOCTRINE OF PROVIDENCE TODAY

Henri Blocher notes that ‘the theme of God’s antecedent [providential] Plan, which looms large in Scripture, is one of the most neglected ones in theology today.’<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Boyd, reviewing works on history, notes: ‘Once, the word *providence* efficiently communicated the idea that God loved us, ruled time to its minute details, and was himself a historical agent. That time is gone, however, and the word has rusted up through misuse beyond utility.’<sup>10</sup> In contrast to these negative evaluations of its credibility, a doctrine of divine providence once commanded a central role in a system of Christian dogmatics. It defined God’s ongoing relation to the world in general, and to the church in particular. William Burt Pope, writing toward the end of the nineteenth century, captured the ubiquity of this doctrine in a Christian system of theology with these words: ‘It silently accompanies theology . . . into all its regions of study.’<sup>11</sup> It is clear from a study of the Christian faith that belief in God’s originating activity, and in God’s subsequent ‘general oversight of creation’<sup>12</sup> as well as active caring for individual humans, has formed a fundamental assumption of that faith.<sup>13</sup> What was once taken for granted, however, has been seriously questioned in that part of the world influenced by the Enlightenment, Modernity and Postmodernity.

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<sup>9</sup>Henri Blocher, ‘Yesterday, Today, Forever: Time, Times, Eternity in Biblical Perspective,’ *Tyndale Bulletin* 52, no. 2 (2001): 201.

<sup>10</sup>Jonathan Tucker Boyd, ‘If Ever We Needed the Lord Before,’ *Books and Culture* (May-June 1999): 41. I owe this reference to Terrance Tiessen, *Providence and Prayer: How Does God Work in the World?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 16.

<sup>11</sup>William B. Pope, *Compendium of Christian Theology*, vol. 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (n.p.: Phillips and Hunt, 1880), 456.

<sup>12</sup>H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1988), 256.

<sup>13</sup>As Thomas Oden notes, ‘[f]rom Hebrew Scriptures, classical Christian exegetes have constantly mined key texts that inform the Christian teaching of providence. If Scripture is taken seriously, providence must be taken seriously. . . . The theme [of providence] is intimately interwoven with essential Judeo-Christian affirmations of the divine majesty, omnipresence, and care’ (*The Living God*, vol. 1, *Systematic Theology* [HarperCollins Publishers, Inc, 1987, 1992; Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1998], 302).

## **A DOCTRINE IN CRISIS**

The problems for a doctrine of providence in the setting of contemporary Western culture are closely associated with sharp critiques of the God of Classical Theism with which the doctrine has often been linked. Phillip Clayton notes the widespread dissatisfaction with the God of Classical Theism,<sup>14</sup> and Sallie McFague, for example, rejects Classical Theism's concept of God.<sup>15</sup> Two symptoms of this disillusionment in the mid-twentieth century were the 'God is dead' movement and the fate of the Biblical Theology movement.

### **Symptoms of the Crisis**

One of the overt indications of problems with the God of Classical Theism was the 'death of God' movement. Although short-lived, it brought into sharp focus the growing disillusionment with traditional understandings of God and providence.<sup>16</sup> In contradistinction to the claim of traditional Christianity that God was both sovereignly present and active in the world, the death-of-God theologies brought into sharp relief the sense of God's absence. Resonating with this sense of the absence of God, John A. T. Robinson helped to popularise this movement with his book, Honest to God.<sup>17</sup> Drawing upon work by Paul Tillich, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Rudolf Bultmann, he pointed out that belief in a God "“up there,”" an 'Other

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<sup>14</sup>Philip Clayton, 'The Case for Christian Panentheism,' Dialog 37, no. 3 (Summer 1998): 203.

<sup>15</sup>Sallie McFague, Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987), 59-69. Cf. also Jürgen Moltmann's critique of all forms of theological monotheism (by which he means unitarianism), monarchianism, hierarchical structures, and metaphors of power (with their political and ecclesial correlates) (The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God, trans. Margaret Kohl [London, UK: SCM Press, Ltd.; New York, NY: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., 1981], 192-202).

<sup>16</sup>Cf. Albert Outler's comments on the significance of this movement (Who Trusts in God: Musings on the Meaning of Providence [New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1968], 25-26). Cf. also, Alistair Kee (The Way of Transcendence: Christian Faith Without Belief in God [Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1971], 75, 78); and Peter C. Hodgson, Winds of the Spirit: A Constructive Theology (London, UK: SCM Press, 1994), 62.

<sup>17</sup>John A. T. Robinson, Honest to God (London, UK: SCM Press Ltd., 1963).

beyond the skies' who worked by supernatural means in the world was no longer credible, not only for those outside the church, but also for many within it.<sup>18</sup>

Another symptom of the theological stress contributing to the demise of belief in the God of Classical Theism, and in providence, was the fate of the biblical theology Movement.<sup>19</sup> Underlying the biblical theology movement was a felt need to discover (or rediscover) a unity in the 'Christian canon,' and 'to recover for both Testaments their significance and power in the life of the church.'<sup>20</sup> Brevard Childs and James Barr, however, wrote sharp critiques of the movement.<sup>21</sup> The crisis for this movement was linked to a perceived failure of Barthian and neo-orthodox theology in particular, and revelation-centred theology in general.<sup>22</sup>

The significance of the perceived demise of the biblical theology movement for a doctrine of providence consists in the way in which this movement was linked to a concept of God's action in history. Langdon Gilkey contributed what became a widely influential<sup>23</sup> critique<sup>24</sup> of G. Ernest Wright's book, God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital (a work seen by many as 'a classic of the biblical theology

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<sup>18</sup>Robinson, Honest, 125-6, 17, 22; cf. *ibid.*, 21-24, 38-9, 64, 78-79, 83, 123-126, 130-132, 136-41.

<sup>19</sup>Cf. Brevard Childs, Biblical Theology in Crisis (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1970), 13-87; James D. Smart, The Past, Present, and Future of Biblical Theology (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1979), 62; and James Barr, The Semantics of Biblical Language (London, UK: Oxford University Press, 1961), 274-5. Cf. also G. E. Wright, God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital, *Studies in Biblical Theology*, no. 8 (London, UK: SCM Press, 1952), 11-12.

<sup>20</sup>Smart, Biblical Theology, 73, 80; cf. Wright, God Who Acts, 11.

<sup>21</sup>Childs, Theology in Crisis; Barr, Semantics.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. Smart, Biblical Theology, 23, 25, 26, 31, 36. James Smart, however, maintains that 'neither internationally nor in America has there been any sign in either the '60s or the '70s that biblical theology is dying or dead' (*ibid.*, 83). He affirms Brevard Child's opinion that there was a crisis, but thinks the crisis is located not in the questionable category of a "biblical theology movement" (*ibid.*, 12), but rather 'in the whole vast enterprise of biblical scholarship' (*ibid.*, 22; cf. *ibid.*, 18-48).

<sup>23</sup>Owen C. Thomas, 'Introduction,' in God's Activity in the World: The Contemporary Problem, ed. Owen C. Thomas, in American Academy of Religion series, *Studies in Religion*, no. 31 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 5; cf. Child's earlier assessment: 'the article carried a tremendous force' (Crisis, 65).

<sup>24</sup>Langdon Gilkey, 'Cosmology, Ontology, and the Travail of Biblical Language,' The Journal of Religion, 41 (1961): 194-205.



movement.<sup>25</sup>), and of Bernhard W. Anderson's, Understanding the Old Testament. Wright had proffered the thesis that 'the central message of the Bible is a proclamation of the Divine action; and if we discard that, we shall have nothing left which makes the Bible what it is. . . . [T]hat which constitutes Biblical faith . . . is first and foremost a confessional recital of the gracious and redemptive acts of God.'<sup>26</sup> Gilkey critiqued this view of divine action for two reasons: first, it not only attempted to retain the univocal biblical language about God's acts in history, but secondly, since it held to a modern worldview in which miracles do not occur, it was forced to deny anything more than an analogical meaning to the concept of 'mighty act' of God. The proponents of the 'God who acts' theology were left with nothing more than 'what the liberals used to call religious experience and religious insight.'<sup>27</sup>

In Child's critique he noted that the very aim of the Biblical Theology Movement to make the Bible more accessible and relevant to the church created a new problem: there was an implicit suggestion that 'the Bible had a particular perspective that demanded an adjustment on the part of modern man,' which meant that in order to have a *Christian* faith one must share in the perspective of the ancient world of the Bible. Moreover, it was also suggested that 'God was to be known in his great acts to the people of God, not in the ideas or values that could be detached from the Biblical record.' But in the contemporary context of the mid-twentieth century the action of this God was increasingly limited to his work in the church.<sup>28</sup> While a survey of the nature and history of the Biblical Theology Movement is

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<sup>25</sup>Owen Thomas, 'Introduction,' Activity, 4; Even if Smart is correct in rejecting Childs' assessment of Wright's book as 'a fair representation of the content of the consensus' of the 'American biblical theologians' (Childs, Theology in Crisis, 24), that doesn't minimize the widespread influence of this common (but putatively erroneous) perception.

<sup>26</sup>Wright, God Who Acts, 120.

<sup>27</sup>Gilkey, 'Cosmology,' 199-203. Gilkey's own critique of the biblical theology movement thus became a source of its downfall (cf. Gary Dorrien, 'Making Sense of Ultimacy: Truths of Experience in Langdon Gilkey's Theological Development,' in The Theology of Langdon B. Gilkey: Systematic and Critical Studies, eds. Kyle A. Pasewark, and Jeff B. Pool (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999), 4).

<sup>28</sup>Childs, Theology in Crisis, 58.



outside the scope of this paper, the point of relevance here is that such emphases as these did not help the cause of maintaining a credible doctrine of providence.

From the foregoing summary it seems clear that significant developments in theology, culture, and biblical studies reflected a deep dissatisfaction with traditional models of God and the God-world relation. As a result both the notions of Christian theism and providence had fallen upon hard times.

### Sources of the Crisis

During the time leading up to this crisis,<sup>29</sup> however, the doctrine of providence had enjoyed a place of privilege in the 'dominant worldview' and theological systems of 'Western culture.'<sup>30</sup> God's sustaining and governing of creation was interpreted more "deterministically" in Augustine and Calvin than in Aquinas<sup>31</sup> or Arminius and his followers,<sup>32</sup> but all were agreed on creation's total and continuing dependence on the Creator's active involvement both for being and for the power to act.

The doctrine of providence was also presented 'in general and timeless terms,' that is, not tied to the ebb and flow of fortune. Rooted in an understanding of God who exists timelessly and changelessly in eternity, the doctrine of providence reflected God's superior perfection, wisdom, and infallibility. Thus, 'Providence

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<sup>29</sup>Several authors have charted this crisis. For example, G. C. Berkouwer (*The Providence of God*, trans. Lewis B. Smedes, Studies in Dogmatics (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952, rpt. 1983)); Langdon Gilkey ('The Concept of Providence in Contemporary Theology,' *The Journal of Religion* 43, no. 3 (July, 1963); Albert Outler (*Who Trusts*); and Horton Davies (*The Vigilant God: Providence in the Thought of Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin and Barth* [New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 1992]).

<sup>30</sup>Julian N. Hartt, 'Creation and Providence,' in *Christian Theology: An Introduction to its Traditions and Tasks*, eds. Peter C. Hodgson, and Robert H. King (Fortress Press, 1982; London, Great Britain: SPCK, 1983), 115, 118. Cf. Berkouwer for a similar assessment (*Providence*, 10). Cf. Thomas Oden's survey of the classical writings of the church on providence (*Living God*, chap. 7); cf. also Benjamin W. Farley's historical overview (*The Providence of God* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988], chaps. 4-7).

<sup>31</sup>Cf. Hartt, 'Creation and Providence,' 120-121.

<sup>32</sup>Cf. Richard A. Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius: Sources and Directions of Scholastic Protestantism in the Era of Early Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991), 240-248, 250-268.

seemed to be a “truth” which could rely upon universal assent,’ even when other doctrines came under fire.<sup>33</sup>

Gilkey summarises the medieval consensus on the doctrine of providence as follows: first, the doctrine of providence expressed ‘the sovereignty of God over historical (and natural) events and so a sovereign ruling action fulfilling God’s final purposes for his creation.’ In this model God’s eschatological goal defines the shape of God’s electing and providential action. Second, ‘God’s providential activity’ controls both ‘objective historical actions and events’ and individual decisions such that God’s goals for each individual are achieved. Third, God is not ‘one external cause among other causes’ in the world, but as primary cause works ‘in and through’ secondary causes to achieve his ends. Fourth, providence works through human freedom, defined as ‘voluntary willing.’ Finally, since it is the providential *will* of God achieving his *plan* for creation, the concept of a blind chance or ‘fate’ behind the events of history is ruled out. And as long as freedom is understood as volitional (versus libertarian), God’s providential and salvific will works to increase the level of freedom in sinful humans who, if left on their own, would be unable to actualise God’s purposes for them.<sup>34</sup>

In spite of the problems that Modern and Post-modern thought have with such a view of the God-world relation, it did provide a model for maintaining confidence in ‘the core conviction of Christian faith that God is redemptively present in history.’<sup>35</sup> Albert Outler stresses that ‘the *intent* of the traditional doctrines of “providence”’ was to show how God is *present* in the world and especially in history as its ultimate context of meaning.<sup>36</sup> It is some version of this central claim which each of the authors in this study wish to retain, even though the models they construct for enshrining this truth differ considerably from one another.

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<sup>33</sup>Berkouwer, Providence, 10-11.

<sup>34</sup>Langdon Gilkey, Reaping the Whirlwind: A Christian Interpretation of History (New York, NY: Seabury Press, 1981), 161-162.

<sup>35</sup>Peter C. Hodgson, God in History, Shapes of Freedom (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 12.

<sup>36</sup>Outler, Who Trusts, 13. Cf. Gilkey, ‘Cosmology’: 189.

Such confidence in God's overarching and meticulously detailed care was put to a severe test in the ensuing centuries, a test which created the contemporary context in which traditional views of providence are seriously questioned.

### **Modernity and the Loss of the Medieval Consensus**

While it is risky to draw causal links too firmly between popular conceptions of the world and the fate of theological doctrines, it seems to be no accident that certain widely accepted assumptions of Western culture, since the rise of the Enlightenment, have posed a challenge to belief in God and God's active presence in the world. The term 'modernity' connotes both a time period and an ethos in Western civilization which has perpetuated many of the ideas and goals of the Enlightenment. Stanley Grenz pictures it as being characterized by the goal of the human conquest of nature for the benefit of humankind, by an understanding of the 'human person as an autonomous rational subject,' and by a view of the world as 'a machine' governed by fixed laws.<sup>37</sup> The conviction that 'knowledge is certain, objective, and good' formed the core set of 'epistemological assumptions' of modernity. These assumptions fuelled the spirit of optimism and belief in progress that characterized the modern mindset.<sup>38</sup>

Both Gilkey and Berkouwer saw the prevalent, modern scientific worldview of the cosmos as a closed system of natural causation, along with the vastly heightened sense of the pervasiveness of evil, as key causes for the demise of belief in a doctrine of providence.<sup>39</sup> They also noted the negative influence of modernity's stress on human autonomy, along with its weakened notion of God's nature and ability to control events in the world.<sup>40</sup> In rejecting the abstract God of Deism,

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<sup>37</sup>Stanley J. Grenz, A Primer on Postmodernism (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 2-3.

<sup>38</sup>Grenz, Primer, 4.

<sup>39</sup>Gilkey, 'Providence': 180, 176; Berkouwer, Providence, 15-17. Cf. Horton Davies for a similar assessment (Vigilant, 3-5). Hebblethwaite and Henderson see 'the problem of evil' as the 'old difficulty' for providence, while 'the new difficulty is our modern scientific understanding of both the natural and the human worlds' that offers 'the prospect of a complete understanding of what happens in the world in purely this-worldly terms' ('Introduction,' in Divine Action: Studies Inspired by the Philosophical Theology of Austin Farrer, eds. Brian Hebblethwaite, and Edward Henderson (Edinburgh, UK: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1990), 1-2).

<sup>40</sup>Gilkey, 'Providence': 179; Berkouwer, Providence, 25-7. Cf. Gilkey, Reaping, 194.

Liberal theology posited a God of love ‘incapable of wrath.’ But in the face of a growing consciousness of evil this ‘eternal Philanthropist was exposed as a delusion,’ and the view of providence as the hidden telos of evolution also fell into discredit.<sup>41</sup>

When the premodern worldview was challenged by the Enlightenment and the rise of modern science, adjustments were made in the doctrine of providence and at first it survived as a key element in liberal theology--now as a concept of “‘evolutionary providence’”<sup>42</sup> in which God is the hidden explanation of its progress.<sup>43</sup> This progress was understood to be inevitable, even when interpreted naturalistically.<sup>44</sup> Challenges to the older, static concept of nature, with the idea of providence as maintaining a given order, arose especially in the area of geology (with a new understanding of aeonic changes governed by inexorable laws seemingly ‘unrelated to animal or human adaptation’), and in the area of biology (with its concept of evolutionary ‘*random* mutations and subsequent *natural* selection’).<sup>45</sup> Loss of a teleological category of purpose in science<sup>46</sup> was--and is--due at least in part to its naturalistic assumptions.<sup>47</sup>

A closely related dilemma feeding the doubt about God’s providential care was the modern question about the ontological status of the reality to which religious statements referred.<sup>48</sup> Scientific statements about reality were taken to be factual, reflecting ‘a typically modern preference for explanations that remain within the

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<sup>41</sup>Berkouwer, Providence, 26-7.

<sup>42</sup>Gilkey, Reaping, 205.

<sup>43</sup>Hartt, ‘Creation and Providence,’ 133.

<sup>44</sup>Cf. Langdon Gilkey, Naming the Whirlwind: The Renewal of God-Language (Indianapolis, OH; New York, NY: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1969), 343; idem, Reaping, 207, 210-216, 195-196; and idem, ‘Concept of Providence,’ 171-175.

<sup>45</sup>Gilkey, Reaping, 204-205.

<sup>46</sup>Hartt, ‘Creation and Providence,’ 115, 126.

<sup>47</sup>Cf. Philip Clayton, God and Contemporary Science, Edinburgh Studies in Constructive Theology, eds. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, and Philip Clayton (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), chap. 6.

<sup>48</sup>Berkouwer, Providence, 19-21.

natural order,<sup>49</sup> while religious statements were understood to be subjective value judgments.<sup>50</sup>

In the face of such fundamental doubt about providence, Gilkey states that the liberal view of providence collapsed in Europe by nineteen eighteen, and in America by the mid-thirties, because the broader pervasive worldview in which it was held had also collapsed.<sup>51</sup> Since there was no longer a sure faith in the inevitable progress of human civilization, there could be no faith in a providential purpose undergirding the evolution of nature and history. Because of a heightened 'sense of the meaninglessness of history,' not only was 'a view of Providence based on natural theology . . . out of the question,' but 'even a theologically derived concept of Providence' was impossible.<sup>52</sup>

Gilkey lists the following set of reasons for 'this sudden divine evacuation of the scene of history': first, a change in New Testament studies shifted from thinking of Jesus' conception of the kingdom of God 'as a future historical commonwealth' realised through human efforts (Ritschl), to that of an 'eschatological kingdom which was to enter history suddenly through God's action, not to be built by and out of history' (Johannes Weiss); second, 'the dissolution of the conception of historical progress'; third, the assumption (even by 'almost all neo-orthodox theologians') of 'the relative autonomy of the casual nexus,' taken in conjunction with an 'emphasis

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<sup>49</sup>Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment?* (New York, NY; Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1988), 7.

<sup>50</sup>Cf. Gordon Kaufman's critique of this division (*Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective* [New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968], 308). Philip Clayton argues that even while Christian theology is now once again being granted a voice in the context of a culture which celebrates particularity, he also cautions that the 'old fact/value distinction' still constitutes a problem for theology in a culture where 'the authority of scientific conclusions as an overarching framework of knowledge has never been so great' (*Contemporary Science*, 2-3, 5).

<sup>51</sup>Cf. Gilkey, *Reaping*, 197.

<sup>52</sup>Gilkey, 'Providence': 173-4. Similar assessments have been made by Berkouwer (*Providence*, 7-11, 12, 13, 17-23), Robinson, (*Honest*, 8-9, 21), Alister Kee (*Way of Transcendence*, 184), and Mark C. Taylor (*Erring: A Postmodern A/theology* [London, UK: The University of Chicago Press, Ltd.; Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1984, pbk., ed., 1987], 4). Gilkey disagrees with Jürgen Moltmann and Schubert Ogden in their contention that it was the classical 'notion of the absolute determiner of all events, good and evil' which caused 'the "death of God" in our time.' While Gilkey agrees that what was understood as the classical view of God (and of providence) was 'the cause of *rejoicing* over that death [of God],' he attributes the 'cultural demise' of that model of God to 'our wider secular spirit' (*Reaping*, 242).

on human autonomy, on man's freedom to be self-creative and so creative as "maker" of history,' left little place for understanding 'how God *can* be involved in natural and social process'; fourth, a shift (in 'dialectical or neo-orthodox theology') to a concept of revelation as a transforming 'self-communication of God through his Word' limited talk of divine action (and hence providence) to the realm of 'personal encounter' with God, resulting in an individualising and 'interiorizing' of providence.<sup>53</sup>

In more conservative circles, as well, doubt about the credibility of belief in God's providential involvement in the affairs of the world led to what David Livingstone terms a 'privatization of Providence.' This shift of focus for providence was accompanied by a move away from postmillennialism (associated with evolutionary progress) to a 'resurgence of premillennialism,' resulting in 'a theology with a far more robust emphasis on intervention than on providential superintendence of the world order.'<sup>54</sup> Focus could thus shift from belief in the gradual progress of history toward the kingdom, to that of the second coming of Christ effecting an apocalyptic consummation of creation. On this latter view one could believe in a hidden general providential plan or strategy, while still maintaining confidence in God's personal and particular direction and help in individual lives.

Some theologians sought to avoid the problems with a doctrine of providence by adapting their theology to some form of existentialism. This allowed them to circumvent 'the objectivity of orthodoxy and natural theology, on the one hand, and the subjectivity of "religious experience," on the other.' One's religious experience of God was "real" in the sense that it involved a communication with and so knowledge of a divine reality over against us.' It was "inward" in the sense it was not derived from, or [sic] could its validity be determined by, matters of fact or propositions concerning them.' And it was "existential" in that it was personal and transforming knowledge.'<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 223-226.

<sup>54</sup>David N. Livingstone, 'Evolution, Eschatology, and the Privatization of Providence,' *Science and Christian Belief* 2, no. 2 (October 1990): 125, 126. Gilkey's analysis of the 'interiorizing' of providence in 'twentieth-century Krisis theology' seems to agree with this assessment (*Reaping*, 226, 216-217; cf. *ibid.*, 216-226, 403, n. 74).

<sup>55</sup>Gilkey, 'Providence': 182; Cf. Stanley Grenz' comment that, in light of the problems with traditional views of providence, 'Existentialist thinkers limited truth to encounter' (*Theology for the*



It thus avoided several problems: the problem of the authority (infallibility) of scripture, the need to repudiate findings of science, and conflict with an empiricist and positivist philosophy of science. At the same time, however, it also isolated the criteria for discerning God's interaction with the world from the possibility of public critique.<sup>56</sup>

Albert Outler drew a direct link between the mood of the times (as reflected in the death of God movement) and a loss of the doctrine of providence. He observes that this modern attitude in Western culture, reflected in the phrase 'the world "come-of-age,"'

means man on his own in a cosmos that has no room and no need for God. And with this triumphant revelation, out goes the linchpin of traditional Christian doctrine: the belief in the providence of God as the ultimate environment of human existence. This is the crux of our crisis, and its scope and purport are as grave as any our forefathers ever had to face.<sup>57</sup>

As Julian Hartt puts it, the dominance of the Modern perspective resulted in the loss of the Medieval 'consensus' on providence.<sup>58</sup> By the early nineteenth hundreds, therefore, the doctrine of providence had suffered a serious blow, and by the nineteenth sixties, with a few exceptions, its presence had reached a nadir in many of the theological systems of the day.<sup>59</sup>

The modern 'flowering of . . . historical consciousness' emphasised the historical conditioning and particularity of the Christian religious experience, and

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Community of God [Carlisle, U.K.: The Paternoster Press; n.p., USA: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1994), 156).

<sup>56</sup>Cf. J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, Theology and the Justification of Faith: Constructing Theories in Systematic Theology, trans. H. F. Snijders (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 19, 139-140, 145. Horton Davies notes that difficulties with traditional views of providence 'forced many believers to become fideists' (Vigilant, 2).

<sup>57</sup>Albert Outler, Who Trusts, 6. It is as 'the ultimate environment of human existence' (ibid.) that this thesis will analyse each model of providence, treating it as a context of meaning.

<sup>58</sup>Hartt, 'Creation and Providence,' 125-139; cf. ibid., 116. Cf. also, Berkouwer, Providence, 11; and Gilkey, Reaping, 207-208, 216-217. Cf. also Emil Brunner's similar assessment of the fate of the nineteenth century's concept of progress (The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption, vol. 2, Dogmatics, trans. Olive Wyon, Lutterworth Library, vol. 39 [London, UK: Lutterworth Press, 1952], 197).

<sup>59</sup>Gilkey, 'Providence': 174.

also pictured God, not as a beyond-history architect and governor of cosmic reality, but as himself conditioned by historical process.<sup>60</sup> While modern science has largely failed to discern evidence of the purpose and teleology in nature and history as held by the consensus view of providence,<sup>61</sup> some contemporary philosophers and theologians have also failed to discover a ground of ultimate meaning behind all the pluriform views of reality.<sup>62</sup> As Hodgson comments, ‘ours is an age of thoroughgoing pluralism and relativism, an age for which there is no center but only a multiplicity of evanescent centers and value-free projects.’<sup>63</sup> This ‘thoroughgoing . . . relativism’ adopted by some theologians has come to be labelled as a shift to *post*-modern forms of theology, which raise another set of problems for providence.

### Postmodernity and the Loss of Providential Meaning

One example of a more extreme form of post-modern “theology” is Mark C. Taylor’s, Erring: A Postmodern A/theology. In this exercise in deconstructive theology, he argues that the death of God leads to the death of the self and of history.<sup>64</sup> Obviously it also leads to a death of providence, since there is no fixed beginning (or ending), no overarching divine metanarrative giving meaning and purpose to all of life. As Taylor argues, there is no hidden ‘providential Reason,’ no ‘divine Logos,’<sup>65</sup> no hidden divinity behind history giving it secret and symbolic

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<sup>60</sup>Hartt, ‘Creation and Providence,’ 130-131. Gilkey repeatedly emphasises that both a new sense of time as linear (Augustine [cf. Reaping, 175]) and of God’s present transformation of the structures of society (Calvin [cf. *ibid.*, 186]) made possible the modern historical consciousness (with its new understanding of creative human freedom and of ‘the relative autonomy of the casual nexus’ [*ibid.*, 224]), resulting in a desecralisation of the world where it was impossible to believe in ‘an all-governing providence’ (*ibid.*, 194). Cf. Pannenberg for a similar conclusion (Anthropology in Theological Perspective, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell [Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1985], 503, 505).

<sup>61</sup>Hartt, ‘Creation and Providence,’ 115, 126; cf. Hodgson, God in History, 31.

<sup>62</sup>Hodgson, God in History, 31-36.

<sup>63</sup>Hodgson, God in History, 31.

<sup>64</sup>Taylor, Erring, chaps. 1-3.

<sup>65</sup>Taylor, Erring, 55, 58-9, 66.



meaning. There is no unified story with beginning, middle and end, no ‘kairotic’<sup>66</sup> moment or event giving meaning to the whole. This means that ‘the person who cannot recover origins can never know the end.’<sup>67</sup> Moreover, in his view, ‘history . . . appears to be [solely] the work of creative imagination.’<sup>68</sup> Modern historical consciousness, taken to its logical conclusion, can thus lead to a post-modern death of history, and therefore also of God’s involvement in history, which was a key aspect of traditional views of providence.

Taylor observes that there is a natural continuity between the anthropological turn of modernity and the ‘posthumanistic a/theology’ of postmodernity.<sup>69</sup> He relates this to ‘the death of God,’ showing how the post-modern move continues and further radicalises the modern suspicion of authority: ‘Carried to completion, humanistic atheism negates itself and leads to posthumanistic a/theology.’<sup>70</sup> Taylor insists, therefore, that neither the Christian God, nor humans, underwrite an overall meaning or ontology of history. History, rather, is a story of human construction (a fiction) intended to ‘ease the trauma of dislocation by weaving scattered events into a seamless web.’<sup>71</sup> Whereas Moderns affirmed the legitimacy of all histories as so many perspectives on the whole, post-modern thought questions whether there is any whole at all. Traditional versions of providence (such as Paul Helm’s<sup>72</sup>) seek to give expression to God’s overarching plans laid in eternity, in the “beginning,” “before” even the creation of the world, and thus in the past. Eschatological versions (such as Pannenberg’s<sup>73</sup>) seek to root providence in the triune God who transcends the time-eternity divide. In turn, who this God will be is only decided at the eschaton, thus

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<sup>66</sup>Taylor, *Erring*, 64.

<sup>67</sup>Taylor, *Erring*, 98.

<sup>68</sup>Taylor, *Erring*, 66.

<sup>69</sup>Taylor, *Erring*, 20.

<sup>70</sup>Taylor, *Erring*, 20.

<sup>71</sup>Taylor, *Erring*, 71.

<sup>72</sup>Helm’s Reformed doctrine of providence will be analysed below, in Chapter Three.

<sup>73</sup>Pannenberg’s trinitarian doctrine of providence will be treated in Chapter Four.

making the details of providence in the present dependent on the future for their source of meaning. According to Taylor's criteria both types of approaches must be categorised as Modern attempts to establish a '*totalizing*' metaphor which represents history as developing linearly.<sup>74</sup> Convinced that there is no such unified story, no integrating law to provide such unity, no history, and hence no 'wholly other God,' post-modern a/theology instead accepts the 'absence' of this God, and rests content with 'mazing grace.'<sup>75</sup>

God is now fully immanent as the 'incarnate word.'<sup>76</sup> Apparently, even in a post-modern a/theology the *search* for meaning, and the *categories* of 'meaning' and 'presence,' are still a part of the paradigm. While letting go of the God who is 'the transcendent Author/Creator/Master who governs from afar,'<sup>77</sup> Taylor is attempting to construct a revised concept of "god," one which can be more radically "present" than the God of Classical Theism. Thus, even in post-modern theology there exists a desire to make "God" present, which, as Outler says, was the very concern of the traditional doctrine of providence. It may be the case that the essentially unrelated God of Aquinas required the addition of a doctrine of providence<sup>78</sup> in order to make this God seem relevant (or more accurately, to clarify *how* this God is relevant and present), but the extreme revision of the concept of "God" by Taylor means 'the absent God is replaced by the signs and symbols themselves, the endless milieu of significations that is language.'<sup>79</sup> And while this drops the traditional referent for 'God,' it does not do away completely with the meaning-making function of the concept--in effect it substitutes "another" (or "others"). But the problem with his approach consists in his reifying traditional *metaphors* and *models* of God into ontological absolutes. By then dismissing these models, he seems to think he has also gotten rid of the very concept of 'god' itself.

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<sup>74</sup>Cf. Taylor, *Erring*, 70-71.

<sup>75</sup>Taylor, *Erring*, 72, 169; cf. *ibid.*, 157, 103-105.

<sup>76</sup>Taylor, *Erring*, 103.

<sup>77</sup>Taylor, *Erring*, 103.

<sup>78</sup>Cf. Ruth Page, *God and the Web of Creation* (London, UK: SCM Press Ltd., 1996), 7-8.

<sup>79</sup>Hodgson, *God in History*, 37.

William Dean characterises his own New Historicist approach to doing theology as less deconstructive than Taylor's,<sup>80</sup> finding instead more in common with Gordon Kaufman's recent theological work--although he expresses concern over the potentially empty or ambiguous nature of Kaufman's neopragmatic concept of God.<sup>81</sup> In advocating 'new historicism' as a basis for doing Christian theology in America, he rejects both 'the objectivism of the realists' and the radical epistemological relativism of the nonfoundationalists. The postmodernism of the 'new historicism' seeks a middle way--it still accepts 'a dependence on particular histories and a resulting uncertainty about history in general,' but it also assumes there 'is an historical past that can be known.'<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, it cannot appeal to knowledge of a God beyond history who providentially guides its progress. What is ultimate is not so much "something" (or some "One") beyond history, of which humans have some intuition, as it is the historical process itself.

Although both Taylor and Dean work hard at avoiding ultimate metanarratives, both their models reflect an epistemological incoherence: How can one say, categorically, what is *not*, when one denies the very category of is/is not? In the very claim that 'there *is* neither fixed center that orients nor an eternally present logos that directs. . . . no special time or special place,'<sup>83</sup> no *kairos*, only 'the everlasting flow, the ever-never-changing-same, the eternal cross(ing) of differences--the arising and passing-away that *does not itself arise and pass away*,'<sup>84</sup> Taylor, in fact, is creating a totalising metaphor or metanarrative: the claim that *there*

<sup>80</sup>Cf. Dean, History Making History: The New Historicism in American Religious Thought, SUNY Series in Philosophy, ed. Robert C. Neville (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988), 19-21, 136-144. Dean wonders whether deconstructive works like Taylor's, if left at the methodological stage, 'leaves to the term *God* any significant use at all' (ibid., 137).

<sup>81</sup>Dean, History, 142-143; cf. ibid., 140-141. Kaufman has more recently emphasised that 'God' is our name for the mystery that *emerges* from our experience of the world as a trajectory motivated by a hidden, 'deeply mysterious,' creativity (In Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993], 293; cf. ibid., 4-5, 268-273, 279, 293, 294, 415-418).

<sup>82</sup>Dean, History, 17.

<sup>83</sup>Mark C. Taylor, Erring, 169.

<sup>84</sup>Mark C. Taylor, Erring, 169 (italics mine). Cf. Albert Outler's distinction 'between clock-time (*chronos*) and life-time (*kairos*)' (Who Trusts, 49; cf. ibid., 48-51).

*is no ultimate source of meaning, no unifying thread, is itself a unifying thread.*

Stated positively, it seems that Taylor has reified open-ended *process* as the *ultimate* meaning-making category.

### Issues Raised by Modern and Post-modern Concerns

Clearly, in theologies such as these, the concept of an extrinsic divine providence weaving continuity and meaning into the events of history is an anomaly. At the same time, they lose the concept of any ultimate hope. Humans are always becoming, but never arriving, finally dissipating back into their constitutive elements. While these models may prove to have potential for focusing one's energy on the here-and-now, they seem to rob one of the traditional source of the deeper significance of the present. With the loss of providence, and of the God of providence, one also loses the rich concept of *kairos* and the meaning and hope implicit in it. It would appear that with the loss of transcendence humans have also lost the basis for moving beyond convention as a basis of self-critique.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, the orthodox Christian claim that humans not only have their being *from* God, but their identity (and therefore significance) *over-against* the creating/sustaining God (*Coram Deo*), seems to embody something fundamentally important to the Christian faith. Can one continue to say he or she is doing *Christian* theology if he or she ultimately rejects the concept of creator and some version of providence?

This brief look at some of the effects of more recent developments in methodology and theological construction in Christian theology illustrates the fact that a doctrine of providence continues to face difficult problems. The unrelated God of Classical Theism has posed for some theologians insurmountable problems in thinking of God in relation to the world.<sup>86</sup> In response to this problem, they have

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<sup>85</sup>Kathryn Tanner argues that it is only by disentangling the Christian concept of God's transcendence from the ways in which it has been subverted to serve particular political hierarchies in history, that we have resources with which to critique present oppressive political structures (*The Politics of God: Christian Theologies and Social Justice* [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992], viii, 3-7).

<sup>86</sup>Cf. John Cobb, Jr.'s and David R. Griffin's succinct critique in their, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1976), 7-10; cf. also John J. O'Donnell, S.J., *Trinity and Temporality: The Christian Doctrine of God in the Light of Process Theology and the Theology of Hope* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1983), 17-21.

opted for various degrees of relativism and pluralism in their theological approaches. They assume an exclusively naturalistic and anthropocentric (“historical”) basis for doing theology, assuming from the outset that whatever God there might be, this God does not exist outside of human constructions of the concept “God,” and therefore “God” only “guides” or “directs” individual and societal histories insofar as the meaning put into the concept serves a pragmatic and humanitarian purpose.<sup>87</sup> This epistemological assumption determines in advance what can be said about God and about providence.

A common thread running through the consensus view of providence, the ‘death of God’ movement, and the Post-modern concern with liberation from all sources of domination, is a concern for optimal human existence and a salutary “presence” of “God” with us--in other words, a context in which maximal meaning and thriving can occur. In spite of the rhetoric involved in the Death of God Movement which implied that the concept of ‘God’ as such was no longer necessary, it was really the God of Classical Theism which seemed to be resented. On the one hand, some of the late modern critiques of providence attempted to re-locate the context of meaning in a deistic view of history.<sup>88</sup> If a God “out there” is in some sense involved, it is only as the initiator of a self-sustaining web of intra-mundane causes. The glory of modern humanity is to no longer need mythical notions of a cosmic baby-sitter, but rather, God’s universal provision of life itself, with its self-regulating laws, is all the “providence” necessary for radically free human creativity. On the other hand, others thought of God as the immanent divine telos behind evolutionary progress. In both cases, the effect was a distancing of God from the particular vicissitudes of human experience and history.

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<sup>87</sup>Cf. Dean, *History*, 17-18.

<sup>88</sup>Nancey Murphy argues that the Newtonian view of the universe was behind the widespread deistic theologies (‘Divine Action in the Natural Order: Buridan’s Ass and Schrödinger’s Cat,’ in *Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., eds. Robert John Russell, Nancey Murphy, and Arthur Peacocke, A Series on ‘Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action,’ ed. Robert John Russell (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications; Berkeley, CA: The Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 1997), 325; cf. Hartt for a similar assessment (‘Creation and Providence,’ 127); cf. also, Christopher Mooney, *Theology and Scientific Knowledge: Changing Models of God’s Presence in the World* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 158-159.

These kinds of critiques reflect serious scientific and moral objections to belief in providence, as well as questions about theodicy, the causal joint between divine and mundane causes, God's role in history, and the efficacy of prayer. The lack of relationality ascribed to the God of classical Christian theism has also evoked womanist concerns about relationality<sup>89</sup> and personalism.<sup>90</sup>

With respect to some in the post-modern move, they seek to jettison even the concept of such an indirect providence, claiming to be content to exist without ultimates. But as Peter Hodgson comments, 'it is odd that the postmodernist sense of "incurable loss" and all-pervasive *différance* should here [in Mark C. Taylor's a/theology] issue in the total "having" of divinity and an undialectical immediacy.'<sup>91</sup> The question becomes, therefore, for which (or whose) God should one look? While post-modern theologies reject speaking of some essence of Christianity, do they not in fact invest Christian concepts or symbols such as 'God' or 'providence' with *some* meaning? Otherwise, there would be little point in using these terms.<sup>92</sup>

Post-modern theologies create obvious problems for any doctrine of providence which takes as its basis a definite origin in the past (an act of creation), a continuing creation (including incarnation), or a consummation at the end (final redemption). As reflected in contemporary criticisms of traditional Christian concepts of the creator God, such models entail that God constitutes the ultimate

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<sup>89</sup>Cf. Kathryn Greene-McCreight, Feminist Reconstructions of Christian Doctrine: Narrative Analysis and Appraisal (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 129; J. A. DiNoia, O.P., notes the feminist critique of the unrelated, 'androcentric conceptions' of God in 'classical Christian theism,' along with their suggestion that 'the ideal of a distant, detached, and omnipotent male' God needs to be changed or replaced 'by one in which female attributes of relationality and engagement figure' ('Knowing and Naming the Triune God: The Grammar of Trinitarian Confession,' in Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism, ed. Alvin F. Kimel, Jr. (Leominster, UK: Gracewing; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), 166.

<sup>90</sup>Cf. Rufus Burrow, Jr., 'Development of Womanist Theology: Some Chief Characteristics,' The Asbury Theological Journal 54, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 52-53.

<sup>91</sup>Hodgson, God in History, 37.

<sup>92</sup>As Sallie McFague concedes, metaphors for God must refer to 'something, or there would be no point in arguing for one rather than another' (Models of God, 196, n. 13).



context of meaning for the individual's history, and for history as a whole.<sup>93</sup> As Mark Taylor rightly notes, the 'thorough interdependence' between the concepts of 'God,' 'self, history and book' means that any change in one category alters 'all of the others.'<sup>94</sup> Thus, to the 'death of God' Taylor adds 'the disappearance of the self, the end of history, and the closure of the book'<sup>95</sup> If one accepts Taylor's logic, then contemporary attempts to retrieve and reinterpret a Christian doctrine of providence must by definition be non-starters--at least as long as one retains the concept of God as a personal entity not reducible to the world itself.

Although such Post-modern treatments of "God" and the "God"-world relation leave little, if any, room for a doctrine of providence, Taylor rightly discerns the intrinsic connection between one's concept of God, providence, anthropology, history, meaning, eschatology and hope. This will mean that any attempt to retrieve a doctrine of providence will entail reflection upon the Christian model of God, as well on other key doctrines.

Moreover, it could be argued that in deconstructing God and providence, in claiming that humans write their own stories, Taylor is nevertheless asserting that humans are defined by narratives. That is, as long as there are humans who function as persons, there will be events, narratives, and therefore meaning. Taylor's view envisions many disconnected micro-narratives, as opposed to the Modern concept of a single meta-narrative. If the developmental psychologists are correct, therefore, and humans invariably seek to make meaning out of their experiences, then it would seem that humans are narrative-based creatures, defined by their contexts and their relations. As Michael Root puts it,

narratives help us understand events by locating them within  
larger meaningful patterns . . . [this] configurational  
understanding is the sort of understanding provided by a

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<sup>93</sup>Gilkey makes a similar point (Maker of Heaven and Earth: The Christian Doctrine of Creation in Light of Modern Knowledge [New York, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1959; Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1965], 308).

<sup>94</sup>Mark C. Taylor, Erring, 7.

<sup>95</sup>Mark C. Taylor, Erring, 7-8.

narrative. Within a narrative, an event ceases to be an isolated monad and becomes part of the whole.<sup>96</sup>

The question is, who or what constitutes the context in which events are woven together to form a narrative; and who in fact does the writing? Traditional versions of providence answered both questions with the word 'God.' The narrative in this view is already written, and humans simply play out their pre-assigned roles. As Chapter Two will show, this view is still current (Paul Helm), but so are a range of other configurations. For example, God establishes the context, but humans write most of the story (Maurice Wiles and Langdon Gilkey); God establishes the context and then partners with us in writing the story (John Sanders); God himself is the context, and partners with us in writing both our story and his story (Jürgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg). These summaries do not capture the nuances of the positions represented, but they do express the way in which contemporary retrievals and reconstructions of providence attempt to find in the doctrine a context of meaning.

### **CONTEMPORARY ATTEMPTS TO RETRIEVE THE DOCTRINE**

In spite of the difficulties faced by a doctrine of providence in the contemporary context just outlined, many theologians continue to work with the doctrine. Some of these treatments take the form of traditional confessional theologies.<sup>97</sup> These tend to be more conservative, often written to reaffirm traditional forms of providence. Others adopt a more ecumenical focus.<sup>98</sup> They are interested in finding a way to recapture or reassert a level of consensus on the nature

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<sup>96</sup>Michael Root, 'The Narrative Structure of Soteriology,' *Modern Theology* 2 (1986): 151-152; quoted in Kathryn Greene-McCreight, *Feminist Reconstructions of Christian Doctrine: Narrative Analysis and Appraisal* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 129.

<sup>97</sup>See for example, Millard Erickson's Baptist perspective, *Christian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, of Baker Book House Company, 1983, 1998); Wayne Grudem's Reformed statement of the doctrine, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, a Division of HarperCollins Publishers, 1994); and H. Orton Wiley's Arminian version, *Christian Theology*, vol. 1 (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1940; 14<sup>th</sup> printing, 1971).

<sup>98</sup>See Moltmann's, *Trinity*; and his, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation*, The Gifford Lectures, 1984-1985, trans., Margaret Kohl (London, UK: SCM Press, 1985). Cf. also Thomas Oden's summary of the 'ecumenical consensus' of the orthodox faith of the Christian church on this topic (*Living God*, ix; see esp. chap. 7); and Langdon Gilkey's, *Reaping*.



and effects of God's presence in history. While they do not necessarily expect to establish unanimity, they do hope to find some common ground on the subject. Still others take the form of philosophical theology, concerning themselves with the problem of evil, theodicy,<sup>99</sup> and the relation between divine sovereignty and human freedom.<sup>100</sup>

Another important area of discussion related to providence involves the topic of divine action as it arises in current discussions between science and theology. The debate revolves around the problem of how to account for the *possibility* of God acting in a world which is otherwise fully explainable in terms of intramundane causes.<sup>101</sup> Many feel that modern science has progressively excluded the need for a "God-of-the-gaps" explanation in accounting for human experience or for the way things work in the world. While a doctrine of providence usually accepts that God *can* and *does* act in the world, this question of divine action remains an important apologetic concern for providence in a culture which accords high status to the sciences' ability to explain things. It deals specifically with what is theoretically and conceptually possible within the framework of a scientific view of the world. One example of work on this issue is that of William Stoeger (Staff Astrophysicist at the Vatican Observatory Research Group, Steward Observatory, University of Arizona). He explains that finding a way 'to describe God's action in the world in a coherent and acceptable way--faithful to the sources of revelation and at the same time

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<sup>99</sup>Cf. Richard Swinburne, Providence and the Problem of Evil (New York, NY: Oxford University Press Inc.; Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1998); Austin Farrer, Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited: An Essay on Providence and Evil, Containing the Nathaniel Taylor Lectures for 1961 (London, UK: Collins, 1962).

<sup>100</sup>Cf. Thomas Flint, Divine Providence: The Molinist Account, Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998); Paul Helm, The Providence of God, in Contours of Christian Theology, series ed., Gerald Bray (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993). John Sanders, The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998). Terrance Tiessen's typology of eleven models of providence gives special focus to the issue of divine sovereignty and human freedom (Providence and Prayer).

<sup>101</sup>Cf. Jack Dodd's atheistic approach to science ('Response by Jack Dodd,' in Science and Theology: Questions at the Interface, eds. Murray Rae, Hilary Regan, and John Stenhouse [Edinburgh, U.K.: T. and T. Clark Ltd.; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994]).

understandable in light of our scientific knowledge of creation--is the central question confronting theology today.'<sup>102</sup>

Ultimately, the scientific and philosophical debate about the *possibility* of divine action may never settle the theological issue of belief in providence. As Philip Clayton points out, even for those 'involved in natural theology in the traditional sense--moving inductively from scientific results to construct one's theology-- . . . . [such] . . . results . . . *underdetermine* one's choice among metaphysical interpretations.'<sup>103</sup> Whatever scientifically informed model of divine action one adopts, belief in providence will involve an irreducible faith commitment.<sup>104</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, therefore, it will be necessary to distinguish between the *theological* doctrine of *providence* in distinction from the more *philosophical* and *scientific* connotations associated with *divine action*. While it is important to note the significance of the complex and wide ranging discussion about divine action as seen from a scientific perspective,<sup>105</sup> a detailed analysis of this topic is beyond the scope of the present work.

However, since traditional views of the doctrine of providence have emphasised God's preserving (sustaining), concurring (co-operating), and governing *activities* in relation to the world he created *ex nihilo*, this thesis assumes that such

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<sup>102</sup>William Stoeger, S.J., 'God and Time: The Action and Life of the Triune God in the World,' *Theology Today* 55, no. 3 (October 1998): 365; cf. *ibid.*, 365-388. Cf. Robert John Russell, Nancey Murphy, and C. J. Isham, eds., *Quantum Cosmology and the Laws of Nature: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., A Series on 'Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action,' ed. Robert John Russell (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications; Berkeley, CA: The Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 1996); and Robert John Russell, Nancey Murphy, and Arthur Peacocke, eds., *Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., A Series on 'Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action,' ed. Robert John Russell (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications; Berkeley, CA: The Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 1997).

<sup>103</sup>Philip Clayton, *Contemporary Science*, 259.

<sup>104</sup>Cf. Dunning, *Grace and Holiness*, 257, 258. Cf. also, Benjamin Farley, *Providence of God*, 17-18; and Diogenes Allen, 'Faith and the Recognition of God's Activity,' in *Divine Action: Studies Inspired by the Philosophical Theology of Austin Farrer*, eds. Brian Hebblethwaite, and Edward Henderson (Edinburgh, UK: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1990); and Thomas Oden, *Living God*, 299.

<sup>105</sup>For example, this discussion shapes Maurice Wiles' approach to providence, and it also plays an important formative role in the way Wolfhart Pannenberg has worked out his whole theology.

action is possible, even if it must be reconceptualised in light of contemporary scientific understandings of the world.<sup>106</sup>

There are, however, several practical reasons for noting this discussion. First, the science-theology discussion of divine action can serve the more negative function of showing which kind of analogies will no longer work--for example, the clockwork universe and the deistic God. John Polkinghorne's general principle, that 'the discussion of science-and-religion is a valuable but second-order task,'<sup>107</sup> would seem to apply to the specific scientific and philosophical discussion about divine action in relation to the theological concern of providence. Constructing a model of divine action which integrates the results of modern science entails the adoption of a *metaphysical* analogy or model (for example, panentheism) which 'provides a guiding framework' for integrating those results with explicitly biblical and theological claims about God. In this way theology supplements science.<sup>108</sup> It will be the coherence of one's whole model of the God-world relation, as it integrates theological insight with scientific insight, which provides the credibility of one's view of divine action.

Second, the extensive dialogue between theology and science on this issue forms a significant part of the context influencing how some theologians think about

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<sup>106</sup>Cf. Christoph Schwöbel's assertion that belief in the possibility of divine action is 'constitutive' of 'Christian faith' (*God: Action and Revelation*, Studies in Philosophical Theology, no. 3, eds. H.J. Adriaanse, and Vincent Brümmer [Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1992], 24; cf. *ibid.*, 25). Maurice Wiles agrees (*God's Action in the World, The Bampton Lectures for 1986* [London, UK: SCM Press Ltd., 1986; Reissued by XPRESS REPRINTS SCM Bookroom, London, UK, 1993], 2-13). For similar conclusions, cf. Owen C. Thomas, 'Preface,' in *God's Activity in the World: The Contemporary Problem*, in American Academy of Religion series, Studies in Religion, no. 31 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), v; *idem*, 'Summary Analysis,' in *ibid.*, 403; Owen C. Thomas, 'Recent Thought on Divine Agency,' in *Divine Action: Studies Inspired by the Philosophical Theology of Austin Farrer*, eds. Brian Hebblethwaite, and Edward Henderson (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1990), 35-50. Among the many works addressing divine action and science, a few are, Ian Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science*, vol. 1, The Gifford Lectures 1989-1991 (New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990); Arthur Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age: Being and Becoming--Natural, Divine and Human*, enlarged edition (London, UK: SCM Press Ltd., 1990); John Polkinghorne, *Science and Christian Belief: God's Interaction with the World* (London, UK: SPCK, 1989); and Stephen Happel ('Divine Providence and Instrumentality: Metaphors for Time in Self-Organizing Systems and Divine Action,' in *Chaos and Complexity*, 177-203).

<sup>107</sup>Polkinghorne, *Reason and Reality: The Relationship Between Science and Theology* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1991), 60.

<sup>108</sup>Philip Clayton, *Contemporary Science*, 260.

providence.<sup>109</sup> In their work on this subject, many scholars are not only struggling to rethink what it might mean for God (as Spirit) to act on or in the physical world, what a divine act might *be*, but also to rethink the locus of such action. Whereas in the past causal language was appropriated from philosophy as a vehicle for expressing God's action in the world, this has increasingly led to difficulties in allowing for libertarian versions of human freedom, in accounting for the notion of inter-personal influence, and in distinguishing between what God does and what humans do. Thus, the problem of divine action involves not only a question of locus (where does God act), but also questions of definition (what is a divine act) and means (how is a divine act carried out).<sup>110</sup>

A third reason for noting this discussion is to pay attention to the fact that theologians do not always maintain a clear distinction between the concepts of providence and divine action.<sup>111</sup> In the same way that some authors understand the defining feature and central core of a doctrine of providence to be the issue of divine sovereignty and foreknowledge as it affects human freedom, so others seem to reduce providence to the problem of divine action.

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<sup>109</sup>Wiles, God's Action. Book length monographs on providence written from a scientific perspective are William G. Pollard, Chance and Providence: God's Action in a World Governed by Scientific Law (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958); and John Polkinghorne, Science and Providence: God's Interaction with the World (London, UK: SPCK, 1989). Two other informative sets of articles on the relation between science and theology, as it impacts providence and divine action, have been drawn together by Ted Peters (Ted Peters, ed., Cosmos as Creation: Theology and Science in Consonance [Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989]); idem, Science and Theology: The New Consonance [Boulder, CO: Westview Press, A Member of the Perseus Books Group, 1998]).

<sup>110</sup>Owen C. Thomas summarises the complexity involved in the question, 'How does God act in the world?' in the following six points: '1. By what means? E.g., God acts in the world through secondary causes. 2. In what way or manner? E.g., God acts in the world uniformly, purposively, persuasively. 3. To what effect? E.g., God acts in the world to heal diseases and to inspire good actions. 4. With what meaning or for what reason or purpose? E.g., God acts in the world to achieve the divine purpose of justice and peace. 5. To what extent or degree? E.g., God acts in the world everywhere and always. 6. On analogy with what? E.g., God acts in the world as the mind acts on the brain.' As Thomas notes, 'the various approaches' adopted by theologians and philosophers on divine action 'can be compared only in so far as they are treating the same question' ('Summary Analysis,' in God's Activity, 234-235).

<sup>111</sup>This can be seen in the way many authors simply treat providence in terms of divine action. For example, in the series, 'Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action,' divine action is the problem in primary focus, but resolution of that problem is seen as crucial for reconstructing a credible doctrine of providence.

A final reason for noting the complex but important debate about how to conceive of divine action in the world is precisely its link with the natural sciences. This debate keeps theological speculation about providence firmly rooted in the hard reality of the world as seen through the lens of a scientific perspective. This does not mean that the concept of divine action must be explained from a purely scientific standpoint before one can believe in providence, but it does keep work on providence connected to what many accept as the empirical realities of modern life. This is especially important in light of the growing acceptance of the fact that both theologians and scientists are rational beings looking at the *same* world.<sup>112</sup>

Although the breadth of treatment in any particular theology of providence exceeds the limits implied by confessional, ecumenical, philosophical, or scientific approaches to the topic, these categories do bring into focus some of the dominant interests in current work on providence.

A final context in which a few theologians have worked out a doctrine of providence consists of constructing a trinitarian framework for the doctrine.<sup>113</sup> Although these trinitarian models of providence explicitly raise the question about the relation of a Christian doctrine of God as it relates to providence, the focus given to a doctrine the Trinity in this thesis is not the question as to *whether* God is a Trinity, nor resolving *how* God is Trinity--that would entail a different study. This project, instead, is asking: Do those treatments of providence that seek to make explicit connections with the doctrine of God as Trinity provide more adequate formulations of providence than those which are not trinitarian? Do they suggest resources for the doctrine that advance its credibility in light of the important problems and concerns regarding providence?<sup>114</sup>

In order to provide a framework for this theme, the survey in the following section records some of the more prominent issues connected with contemporary

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<sup>112</sup>Cf. J. Wentzel van Huyssteen's reflection on this issue in his chapter on, 'The Shaping of Rationality in Science and Religion,' in Essays in Postfoundationalist Theology (Cambridge, U.K.; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997); cf. also idem, Justification of Faith.

<sup>113</sup>Two of these works on trinitarian providence will be analysed in Chapter Four of this thesis (Wolfhart Pannenberg and Jürgen Moltmann).

<sup>114</sup>Criteria for evaluating these questions will be presented in the section below on method.



discussions of the Trinity as a way of acknowledging the context in which current discussion of a trinitarian view of providence takes place.

## **A DOCTRINE OF PROVIDENCE AND THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY**

More specifically, this section will note the grammatical or normative function claimed for a doctrine of the Trinity, and briefly note reasons for the eclipse and subsequent resurgence of interest in the Trinity, especially as these have relevance for a doctrine of providence.

### **A DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY AS GRAMMATICAL RULE**

Those who think of a doctrine of the Trinity as the definitively Christian understanding of God give first priority to its grammatical function in delimiting what one can say about the nature of God. Some of these trinitarian theologians then make another methodological decision and interpret all other Christian doctrines from an explicitly trinitarian perspective. In this regard, the grammatical status of a doctrine of the Trinity allows it to function as a material criterion for a Christian doctrine of providence. It will be treated as such in this thesis.

Methodologically, this means that for these trinitarian theologians one must first work from the presupposition that a trinitarian understanding of God is a given,<sup>115</sup> and only then work out its implication for other doctrines. If this initial decision is found to aid in the retrieval and restatement of other doctrines, that is a bonus, but it cannot be one's initial motive in developing a trinitarian doctrine of providence.

Although the doctrine of the Trinity early came to comprise 'the fundamental grammar of our knowledge of God,'<sup>116</sup> it has not often played a central role in the

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<sup>115</sup>Cf. Claude Welch, *In This Name: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), 238; cf. *ibid.*, 242, 245.

<sup>116</sup>Thomas Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh, UK: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1996), 2. For similar assessments of the grammatical or normative status of a doctrine of the Trinity, cf. Claude Welch, *In this Name*, vii-ix; Schwöbel, 'Introduction. The Renaissance of Trinitarian Theology: Reasons, Problems and Tasks,' in *Trinitarian Theology Today: Essays on Divine Being and Act*, ed. Christoph Schwöbel (Edinburgh, UK: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1995), 4; cf. *ibid.*, 1-30; Gerald O'Collins, S.J., *The Tripersonal God: Understanding and Interpreting the Trinity* (Mahway, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999), 6; Thomas Oden, *Living God*, 209, and chap. 5. Cf. also, Edmund J. Fortman, *The Triune God: A Historical Study of the Doctrine of the Trinity*,



Christian doctrine of providence,<sup>117</sup> and as a key doctrine in its own right, it has suffered neglect.<sup>118</sup> However, there has been a recent resurgence of interest in the Trinity, and two of the models of providence reviewed in this thesis are explicitly trinitarian. Since some of the reasons for the earlier lapse of interest in the doctrine have correlative relevance to difficulties with Classical Christian Theism and with traditional models of providence, it will be helpful to note a few of them here.

### ***THE ECLIPSE OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY***

Karl Barth and Karl Rahner were among the first theologians in the twentieth century to alert the Christian community to its neglect of the Trinity. Just as belief in a traditional form of providence became problematic in an atmosphere of naturalistic presuppositions, so too a doctrine of the Trinity came into question when historical criticism raised serious questions about the Gospel of John ‘as a primitive historical source.’<sup>119</sup> John Thompson records the British Council of Churches’ report which ‘points out that historical critical studies “bear hard on the doctrine of the Trinity” for two reasons. First, there are in the New Testament very “few biblical texts which can be claimed to have an explicitly trinitarian significance.” Second, “many of those passages which do appear to support the doctrine of the Trinity belong to later stages of the New Testament tradition.”’ Since it is assumed that ‘the earliest strata of tradition are the most reliable,’ and since the deity of Christ (a claim ‘inextricably

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Theological Resources, eds. John P. Whalen, and Jaroslav Pelikan (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster; London, UK: Hutchinson and Co. [Publishers] Ltd., 1972).

<sup>117</sup>Cf. the lack of mention of the Trinity in Benjamin Farley’s history of the doctrine of providence (*Providence of God*). Although some systematic theologies do mention the trinitarian nature of providence, they do little to work out the implications, choosing instead to relate the doctrine of the Trinity to soteriology (cf. for e.g., H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, vol. 1). Thomas Oden insists providence is a trinitarian work (*Living God*, 229), but actually relates it more to God’s single essence and to God’s attributes (ibid., chap. 7). Barth is a notable exception to this trend in the first half of the twentieth century, and Pannenberg and Moltmann in contemporary theology.

<sup>118</sup>Catherine Mowry LaCugna traces the early rise and subsequent decline of the doctrine of the Trinity in her, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991; Harper Collins Paperback edition, 1993), 8, 21-198; cf. her chapter, ‘Re-conceiving the Trinity as the Mystery of Salvation,’ in *Readings in Modern Theology: Britain and America*, ed. Robin Gill [London, UK: SPCK, 1995]). Cf. also the accounts of Claude Welch, *In This Name*; and James Mackey, *The Christian Experience of God as Trinity* (London, UK: SCM Press, 1983).

<sup>119</sup>Welch, *In This Name*, 4.

linked with the Trinity') 'is not explicitly stated there,' this makes it difficult to take a doctrine of the Trinity as normative.<sup>120</sup>

The eclipse of interest in the Trinity may also be due in part to the focus in classical Christian theism on a monistic view of God which drew heavily upon Greek notions of deity, thus emphasising God's perfections in terms of static and absolute attributes.<sup>121</sup> This came into acute focus in christology. Michael Langford points out, for example, that the broader problem of how to relate the concept of God as an eternal, unchanging, "affectionless," and transcendent Being, to the concept of a personal God of love in caring relationship with the world, finds a focus in Christology, 'in the question of the nature of Christ.'<sup>122</sup> Eugene TeSelle notes that, whereas some early theologians saw in the Logos or Word a mediating principle between the immutable domain of divine spirit and the changing realm of matter, 'the more the full divinity of the Word was stressed, the more the Word was elevated above the firmament, so to speak, and disappeared into the transcendent divine realm.'<sup>123</sup> Gilkey offers a similar assessment, observing that after Nicea and Constantinople each member of the Trinity was 'defined as fully divine,' thereby 'negating every creaturely attribute: temporality, potentiality, changeableness, relatedness, and dependence.'<sup>124</sup> Colin Gunton notes an opposite problem: Enlightenment influences resulted in seeing Jesus, not as an incarnate revelation of

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<sup>120</sup>John Thompson, Modern Trinitarian Perspectives (Oxford, UK: New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994), 8.

<sup>121</sup>Cf. Leonardo Boff's overview of these and other factors in Trinity and Society, trans. Paul Burns, Theology and Liberation Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books; Kent, UK: Burns and Oates, 1988 [Originally published as A Trindade, a Sociedade e a Libertação (Petrópolis, RJ, Brazil: Editora Vozes Ltda, 1986; 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 1987)], 13-20.

<sup>122</sup>Michael Langford, Providence (SCM Press Ltd., 1981), 145.

<sup>123</sup>Eugene TeSelle, 'Divine Action: The Doctrinal Tradition,' in Divine Action: Studies Inspired by the Philosophical Theology of Austin Farrer, eds. Brian Hebblethwaite, and Edward Henderson (Edinburgh, U.K.: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1990), 83; cf. *ibid.*, 84.

<sup>124</sup>Gilkey, 'God,' in Christian Theology: An Introduction to its Traditions and Tasks, eds. Peter Hodgson, and Robert King (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1982; London, U.K.: SPCK, 1983), 68-69.

God, 'but as a man pointing to God.' For this reason a doctrine of 'the Trinity' becomes automatically problematic.'<sup>125</sup>

In view of these developments, christology, as a means of understanding the Trinity's providential relation to the universe, seems both to be part of the solution and part of the problem, that is, Jesus Christ, as the divine-human person embodies the eternity-time relation within himself, but there is no easy solution to the problem of understanding how the divine and human natures form a unity in one person.

Once the Enlightenment and Modernity made dominant the criteria of nature,<sup>126</sup> immanence, relatedness, historical consciousness, and becoming for the understanding of God,<sup>127</sup> the seemingly unrelated, immutable and impassible Trinity was seen by many as no longer relevant.<sup>128</sup>

Whether or not these critiques are deserved, the doctrine of God as Trinity has suffered a fate of irrelevance similar to that of the God of Classical Theism. It is precisely this set of problems with the categories of absolute perfection and omni-causality which has invoked sharp criticism of both the classical model of the Christian God and of providence.<sup>129</sup>

Besides the problems involved in discerning God as a Trinity on the basis of a natural theology (that is, by reason alone, without special revelation),<sup>130</sup> and in addition to the rejection of the Trinity by 'the Socinians and Arminians of the seventeenth century,' Walter Kasper points out that with the Enlightenment a new conceptual problem arose with respect to the Trinity. Whereas the ancient and

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<sup>125</sup>Colin Gunton, The Promise of Trinitarian Theology (Edinburgh, UK: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1991, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1997), 3.

<sup>126</sup>Walter Kasper notes that 'nature' is here 'understood after the manner of the Stoics, . . . [as] the critical court of appeal and the norm of religion' (The God of Jesus Christ, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell [New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1984, 1987], 24).

<sup>127</sup>Cf. Gilkey, 'God,' 72, 77-78, 79.

<sup>128</sup>William J. Hill illustrates this by looking at the treatment given the Trinity by Schleiermacher, Paul Tillich, Cyril Richardson, and others--including Maurice Wiles (The Three-Personed God: The Trinity as a Mystery of Salvation (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1982; rpt. in paperback, 1988), 34-109; cf. *ibid.*, 253ff).

<sup>129</sup>Cf. Sallie McFague, Models of God, ix.

<sup>130</sup>Cf. Stanley Grenz, Community of God, 82. Cf. also, Walter Kasper, God of Jesus, 313.

medieval church understood ‘person’ in substantive or ‘ontological terms,’ in ‘the modern period, person . . . is defined as a self-conscious free center of action and as individual personality’ or as ‘subject.’<sup>131</sup> Thus, ‘the idea of three persons in one nature became impossible, not only logically but psychologically as well. For the modern self-conscious person could see in other persons only competitors. The combining of oneness and threeness became an insoluble problem.’<sup>132</sup>

In Claude Welch’s account of the loss of interest in the metaphysical doctrine and religious significance of the Trinity, it seems evident, on the one hand, that for liberal theologians a doctrine of the Trinity is not needed when one defines one’s religious faith as an expression of a universal moral code. ‘Conservative’ theologians, on the other hand, retain faith in the doctrine as a datum of revelation, but fail to integrate it with other doctrines and with spiritual life.<sup>133</sup>

Several authors have noted the failure of the church to maintain the distinct roles played by the persons of the Trinity in creation. Augustine and Aquinas are seen as major contributors to this state of affairs, by thinking of all of the Trinity’s works *ad extra* as undivided.<sup>134</sup> The point here is not that there could be a lack of unanimity among the three “persons” of the Trinity, but that a trinitarian distinction was not required in explicating God’s action toward the creation.<sup>135</sup> It would appear that there is a close connection between an emphasis on Western monotheism and a loss of the Trinity in its doctrines of creation and providence.

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<sup>131</sup>Kasper, *God of Jesus*, 285, 288.

<sup>132</sup>Kasper, *God of Jesus*, 285. John Thompson also notes this problem with language in relation to the Trinity, both because the concept stretches language to its ‘limit,’ and because of the changing meaning of terms like ‘person’ (*Modern Trinitarian Perspectives*, 6-7). Cf. Philip Clayton’s critique of substance language as applied to a doctrine of God (‘Christian Panentheism,’ 203, 204).

<sup>133</sup>Claude Welch, *In This Name*, Chap. 1. Cf. Karl Rahner’s similar assessment of the doctrine’s practical irrelevance in the life of the faith community (*The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel [Kent, UK: Burns and Oates, 1970], 10-11, 13-14). Cf. also Christoph Schwöbel, ‘Introduction,’ *Trinitarian Theology*, 8-9.

<sup>134</sup>The classic principle was, ‘*opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa* (the actions of the Trinity outwards are undivided)’ (Gunton, *Promise*, 4). Christoph Schwöbel makes this point with regard to Augustine: ‘Introduction,’ *Trinitarian Theology*, 5; LaCugna makes a similar point with regard to Aquinas: *God For Us*, 165-66, 158, 159, 161, 214.

<sup>135</sup>Cf. Rahner’s treatment of this problem (*Trinity*, 15-24); cf. also Robert Jenson, *The Triune Identity* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1982), 126-127.

In a Newtonian understanding of the universe, whereby it eventually came to be seen as self-sustaining, many found it natural to picture God as having created the universe with its clearly defined, smoothly functioning laws, and then retiring from direct involvement with its existence (a deistic model). When this view of the universe was combined with the Medieval emphasis on the essentially unrelated God of Classical Theism, the Augustinian and Aquinian doctrine of the undividedness of the Trinity's works *ad extra*, Reformation interest in personal salvation, and Schleiermacher's relegation of the Trinity to an appendix, there did not seem to be much need of, or place for, an emphasis on the Trinity as related to providence. If a need still existed for explicit correlation between the two doctrines, it was to some degree already covered by the ancient doctrine of appropriations as exemplified in the ecumenical creeds, or simply assumed as already implied in treatments of christology, pneumatology, and soteriology.<sup>136</sup> However, the large amount of recent work on the Trinity as the definitively *Christian* doctrine of God raises again the question about how to relate this doctrine to other doctrines in theology, including providence.

### **A REVIVAL OF INTEREST IN THE TRINITY**

Although the doctrine of the Trinity had been long neglected, theologians now evidence a renewed and growing interest in this topic.<sup>137</sup>

Among the many factors that account for a resurgence of interest in the doctrine of the Trinity in Western theology, a major influence seems to be its 'encounter with Eastern Orthodoxy, its liturgy and its theology, in the ecumenical

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<sup>136</sup>Cf. Pope's comment on this latter method of covering providence (Compendium of Theology, vol. 1: 456).

<sup>137</sup>Cf. John Thompson, Modern Trinitarian Perspectives, 3-19; cf. also Gunton, Promise, xi, xv, 1-2; and Dalferth, 'Eschatological Roots,' 147. There is a plethora of recent material on the Trinity, but a few of the prominent works include Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, vol. 1, pt. 1 (Edinburgh, UK: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1936); Karl Rahner, Trinity; Claude Welch, In This Name; James Mackey, God as Trinity; Catherine Mowry LaCugna, God For Us; Christoph Schwöbel, ed., Trinitarian Theology Today: Essays on Divine Being and Act (Edinburgh, UK: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1995); Colin Gunton, The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity, The Bampton Lectures 1992 (New York, NY; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993); idem, Promise; Robert Jenson, Triune Identity; idem, The Triune God, vol. 1, Systematic Theology (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997); Moltmann, Trinity; Wolfhart Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 3 vols. (trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Edinburgh, UK: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1991, 1994, 1998).



context.’<sup>138</sup> Lesslie Newbigin adds two further contributing factors to the ‘strong revival of trinitarian thinking in Western theology’<sup>139</sup>: the blaming of the classical, unitarian concept of God (as either ultimate substance or subject) as having fostered first, ‘our prevailing individualism,’ and second, the validation of ‘patterns of domination in human affairs.’<sup>140</sup> In response to these imbalances some contemporary theologians seek to replace an emphasis on individualism with one of social relation, and second, to reject a relation of domination in favour of one of shared responsibility. For some of these theologians a doctrine of the Trinity appears to offer resources for this project.<sup>141</sup> Christoph Schwöbel reports that ‘it has to be acknowledged that one of the factors operative in the increased interest in trinitarian theology is an acute awareness of the interrelationship between theological concepts and the conceptions that inform our views of the natural and social world,’ that is, it profoundly influences the shape of one’s worldview.<sup>142</sup>

This renewed interest in the relevancy of a doctrine of the Trinity to not only other areas of theology, but also to life both sacred and secular, can be easily illustrated. Catherine LaCugna has applied the doctrine to anthropology, ethics, spirituality and sacramental theology.<sup>143</sup> Barbara Brown Zikmund links the Trinity

<sup>138</sup>Schwöbel, ‘Introduction,’ Trinitarian Theology, 3.

<sup>139</sup>Lesslie Newbigin, ‘The Trinity as Public Truth,’ in The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: Theological Essays on Culture and Religion, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 6.

<sup>140</sup>Newbigin, ‘Trinity,’ 5-6.

<sup>141</sup>Colin Gunton, for example, sees in the doctrine of the Trinity resources for overcoming the either/or option between individualism and collectivist socialism as fostered by Modernity (The One, the Three and the Many). Cf. also Leonardo Boff, Trinity and Society; and Miroslav Volf, “‘The Trinity is our Social Program’: The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement,” Modern Theology 14 (July 1998): 403-423.

<sup>142</sup>Schwöbel, ‘Introduction,’ Trinitarian Theology, 11; cf. *ibid.*, 9-10.

<sup>143</sup>LaCugna, God for Us. John D. Zizioulas has also applied the doctrine of the Trinity to anthropology. See his ‘On Being a Person: Towards an Ontology of Personhood,’ in Persons: Human and Divine, eds. Christoph Schwöbel, and Colin E. Gunton (T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1991); *idem*, Being as Communion (London, UK: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985); and *idem*, ‘The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity: The Significance of the Cappadocian Contribution,’ in Trinitarian Theology Today: Essays on Divine Being and Act, ed. Christoph Schwöbel (Edinburgh, UK: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1995).



to women's experience.<sup>144</sup> Leonardo Boff finds in the doctrine resources for liberation.<sup>145</sup> Francis Watson addresses the significance of the relationship of biblical hermeneutics, narrative and interpretation to 'the triune, narratively-encoded God of Christian faith.'<sup>146</sup> The authors of The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age explore 'its relevance to the question of interreligious dialogue.'<sup>147</sup> James B. Torrance demonstrates the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity for the worship of the church.<sup>148</sup> William Stoeger applies the doctrine of the Trinity to the problem of divine action.<sup>149</sup> Colin Gunton links the Trinity to both creation and providence.<sup>150</sup> And Wolfhart Pannenberg and Jürgen Moltmann make explicit connections between the Trinity and providence. Implicit in these applications is the assumption that since the Christian doctrine of God is that of a Trinity, it would seem logical to ask what difference this fundamental grammar might make in the elucidation of other doctrines. This will comprise one of the questions asked of each author throughout the course of this investigation.

In spite of the many difficulties associated with both a doctrine of providence and a doctrine of the Trinity, there seems to be sufficient warrant for discussing them together to make the effort worthwhile. First, when the doctrine of the Trinity is described as the grammar of the Christian doctrine of God, its normative function for what can be said about God, and about other doctrines, is highlighted.

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<sup>144</sup>Barbara Brown Zikmund, 'Trinity and Women's Experience,' Christian Century (April 15, 1987): 354-356.

<sup>145</sup>Leonardo Boff, Trinity and Society.

<sup>146</sup>Francis Watson, Text, Church and World: Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective, [Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Edinburgh, UK: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1994], 84; cf. 137-153, 207-8. Kevin Vanhoozer has also related the Trinity to the issue of hermeneutics (Is There Meaning in This Text: The Bible, The Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998).

<sup>147</sup>Cf. esp., Gary Badcock, 'Karl Rahner, the Trinity, and Religious Pluralism,' in The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: Theological Essays on Culture and Religion, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 143.

<sup>148</sup>James B. Torrance, Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996).

<sup>149</sup>William Stoeger, 'God and Time.'

<sup>150</sup>Colin Gunton, The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study, Edinburgh Studies in Constructive Theology (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 1998).

Second, given the problems with providence which implied for some that God (as traditionally understood) is absent from human history, it would seem that some response to critiques of Christian Classical Theism is required. Concern about the apparently uni-causal and non-reciprocal relations of God to the world<sup>151</sup> has pushed many theologians toward more immanent models of the God-world relation. Julian Hartt summarises this movement toward more immanent views with respect to providence as follows. The Medieval consensus held to a God of perfect substance and ‘eminent cause.’ In turn, ‘liberal theologians of idealist persuasion responded with subject as the replacement for substance and with immanent teleology in the place of the theological determinism of the consensus.’ A more recent alternative is the God of Process thought who supplies ‘not energy or being, but aim and relative order.’<sup>152</sup>

Third, a trinitarian doctrine of creation could *imply* a trinitarian doctrine of providence, especially when a doctrine of providence is subsumed under a doctrine of creation.<sup>153</sup> There is precedent for this in the history of linking the work of the “individual” trinitarian Persons to their distinct roles in the economy. This is seen most clearly in the work of redemption, but it is also true of a doctrine of creation: ‘The Father creates through the Son and by the power of the Spirit.’<sup>154</sup>

<sup>151</sup>Cf. Moltmann, *Trinity*; McFague, *Models of God*; and Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*. Although not the only issue, this is the special burden of Gilkey’s and Moltmann’s work on providence, to be reviewed in chaps. 2 and 4, respectively. Denis Edwards expresses a similar concern (‘Discovery of Chaos and the Retrieval of the Trinity,’ in *Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., eds. Robert John Russell, Nancey Murphy, and Arthur Peacocke, A series on ‘Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action,’ ed. Robert John Russell [Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications; Berkeley, CA: The Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 1997], 157-158).

<sup>152</sup>Hartt, ‘Creation and Providence,’ 133, 134. For a survey of the way God’s transcendence and immanence have been viewed, see Stanley Grenz and Roger Olsen, *Twentieth-Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Carlisle, UK: The Paternoster Press; Downer Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1992). Cf. Sallie McFague’s *Models of God*; and idem, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993).

<sup>153</sup>As, for example, in Gunton’s *Triune Creator*, and Pannenberg’s *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Edinburgh, UK: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1994). Cf. also Colin Gunton, ‘Relation and Relativity: The Trinity and the Created World,’ in *Trinitarian Theology Today: Essays on Divine Being and Act*, ed. Christoph Schwöbel (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1995), 92-112.

<sup>154</sup>Thomas Oden, *Living God*, 251; cf. also, *ibid.*, 229, 246-251.

Finally, the current interest in divine immanence and relationality seems to relate naturally to a doctrine of God in which one member of the Trinity becomes incarnate in human form while continuing to be divine, who remains present to humans through the Holy Spirit, and who mediates the Father's presence.<sup>155</sup> This connection is doubly important since it is not only about *how* God is present (a question of function) but *which* God is present (a question of identity and ontology). Robert Jenson agrees, and argues that in a culture which is increasingly pluralistic, it behoves Christians to clearly identify '*which* god we mean' if we expect 'Christian discourse to be intelligible.'<sup>156</sup> Moreover, Jenson raises the next logical question: 'how must reality be interpreted, if its God is triune?'<sup>157</sup> This question can be adapted to the present project: *How must providence be interpreted if it is the work of a triune God?* This question is especially relevant since a doctrine of providence has traditionally been the locus of the question of how the Christian God relates to the present world.

Although allusions to methodology have been made in the foregoing material, it will be necessary at this point to give a more explicit exposition of the criteria to be used in this thesis for analysing models of providence.

## METHOD

The foregoing survey has revealed how complex the question of a doctrine of providence is in the present milieu in which theologians work. Once the Enlightenment made it possible to question the church and the shape of its basic doctrines, it was only a short step to ask whether God was actually as the Christian-classical synthesis had pictured him, and further, whether God was present and active in the world in just the way the consensus had affirmed. This is the broad context in which a doctrine of providence must be considered today.

While previous sections have charted some of the contemporary problems with providence, the scope of this thesis would not allow a full delineation of the

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<sup>155</sup>Cf. Ted Peters, God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 15, 165.

<sup>156</sup>Jenson, Triune Identity, 112.

<sup>157</sup>Jenson, Triune Identity, 161.

problems, nor would it be able to respond to all of them. Moreover, the authors reviewed in the following chapters will themselves highlight what they think are major concerns with providence.

Since this is a thesis exploring the contemporary problematic of a Christian theology of providence, it will be impossible to critique the whole set of doctrines and arguments which are required to give a particular theological model, as a whole, its credibility and coherence. Thus, many central doctrines will only be treated tangentially, that is, when discussion of them is necessary in order to understand a particular author's treatment of providence.

At the risk of oversimplifying important concerns, the number and complexity of the issues involved with providence make it necessary to mark off certain aspects of the discussion which cannot be fully explored in this thesis. Such topics as divine action, divine sovereignty and human freedom, the relation between time and eternity, and theodicy, as distinct subjects of discussion in their own right, are not the main foci of this thesis, even though reference to them figures prominently in some of the authors surveyed. Instead, this thesis focuses on how current *models* of providence define *God's relation to history*, and thus how they function as *instruments of meaning-making*.<sup>158</sup> The way meaning is defined, and the kind of meaning constructed will in turn indicate something about *the shape of hope* (present and future) engendered by a model of providence.

Against this general background, not all authors treat a doctrine of providence as having the same content, nor do they emphasise the same aspects of the doctrine. Even when there is some consensus on the scope of sub-doctrines to be included in the discussion, some then treat providence primarily from the perspective of the problems associated with the philosophical discussion of divine sovereignty, divine

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<sup>158</sup>The concept of doctrines of providence functioning as 'instruments of meaning-making' is used here mainly in the sense of discovering or recognising meaning, although they do shape that meaning to some extent. As used in this thesis, 'meaning-making' assumes a critical realist view of epistemology in which one can truly know *something* about reality, but not know or represent reality exhaustively.

foreknowledge, and human freedom<sup>159</sup>; others see theodicy as the primary concern<sup>160</sup>; and still others centre attention on the issue of divine action.<sup>161</sup>

Nevertheless, these differing perspectives identify important concerns associated with providence. This means that some kind of criterial structure is required which allows the insights of a particular model to be incorporated into, and made relevant to, the larger discussion.

In order, therefore, to establish a context for evaluating these doctrines of providence, it will be helpful to first outline some of the important functions a doctrine of providence was traditionally designed to serve. Although not all authors would agree on the precise number and character of these functions, the following list will serve as a general guideline for comparing what recent treatments of providence consider important, and whether they have retained, discarded or otherwise accounted for any of these functions. Second, the use of key terms as used in this thesis will be clarified. Finally, it will be necessary to establish the criteria being used for evaluating models of providence.

### ***TRADITIONAL PROVIDENCE AND ITS FUNCTION***

A doctrine of providence traditionally affirmed that God, through his continuing relation to all that is not divine, maintained creation in being and enabled it to serve its God-given purposes. With this claim another truth surfaces: providence is the work of God which ensures that creation functions as a *uni*-verse instead of a *multi*-verse, cosmos versus chaos, and has both a beginning and a consummation, a history. It is God's (often) hidden preserving, enabling and guiding which ensures that creation is able to support life and that humans are able to enter into a personal relationship with a personal God which will eventually culminate in God's dwelling with redeemed humans for eternity. Although this was an explication of the *Christian* God's providential relation to the universe, it was not

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<sup>159</sup>Cf. Helm (Providence); John Sanders (Risks); and Terrence Tiessen (Providence and Prayer).

<sup>160</sup>Cf. Richard Swinburne, Providence.

<sup>161</sup>Cf. for e. g., the collection of essays in, Divine Action: Studies Inspired by the Philosophical Theology of Austin Farrer, eds. Brian Hebblethwaite, and Edward Henderson (Edinburgh, UK: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1990).



explicated in trinitarian terms, but instead, according to the formula *opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*.<sup>162</sup>

As noted above, Albert Outler characterised the traditional role of providence as defining ‘the ultimate environment of human existence.’<sup>163</sup> Everything occurred by and through God’s direct involvement, and for the purpose of God’s sovereign and benevolent purposes. Human history derived its overarching source, meaning and hope from this providential context.

This multidimensional function of a doctrine of providence, as it addressed one’s ultimate concerns, gave it a close relation to one’s worldview. There are several definitions of worldview, but common to them all seems to be the idea that ‘a worldview is the sum of a person’s basic assumptions, held consciously or subconsciously, about life and the nature of reality’<sup>164</sup>

The fact that a doctrine of providence stated how the Christian God related to the world meant that it served both as a doctrine in its own right, and as a model for the God-world relation in general. This feature of a doctrine of providence accounts for its ubiquity in a system of theology, for its practical importance in guiding and reassuring Christian life, and for the complexity of the doctrine itself.

Theologians use a wide variety of terms in connection with the function of a theology of providence. A few examples are, worldview, metaphysical model, tradition, narrative, model, root metaphor, doctrine, belief, theory, system of theology, history, and meaning. While each author does not utilize all of these terms, even those terms he or she does use are not always invested with a univocal meaning or application. It is necessary, therefore, to briefly suggest a way of thinking about the inter-relations of worldviews, metaphors, models, theories and doctrines as these terms are used in this thesis.

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<sup>162</sup>Although this is a common criticism, and often seems to be an emphasis in traditional treatments of the God-world relation (see chap. 3 of this thesis), I will argue in chap. 5 that trinitarian action *ad extra* is indeed undivided, but not undifferentiated.

<sup>163</sup>Outler, *Who Trusts*, 6. Cf. Hartt, ‘Creation and Providence,’ 125.

<sup>164</sup>Kenneth D. Boa, and Robert M. Bowman, Jr., *Faith Has Its Reasons: An Integrative Approach to Defending Christianity* (Colorado, CO: NavPress, 2001), 111. Cf. N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, vol. 1, *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (London, UK: SPCK; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 122-123.



## **CLARIFICATION OF TERMS**

The traditional way of referring to providence is to treat it as one doctrine in a systematic theology, usually as an explication of God's present relation to the world. But the doctrine of providence itself can contain sub-doctrines (for example, preservation, concursus, government); control how other doctrines are defined; and serve as a shorthand description for understanding the character of the whole God-world relation within a particular theological tradition.<sup>165</sup> Thus, providence can be confusingly referred to as a theology of providence, a doctrine, or a model.

The present project will regard systematic treatments of providence as models. In order to justify this decision, it is necessary to first define the concept of 'model' as used here, and then relate this to other key terms used in connection with providence.

This thesis will adopt Sallie McFague's working definition of a model as 'a metaphor with "staying power." A model is a metaphor that has gained sufficient stability and scope so as to present a pattern for relatively comprehensive and coherent explanation.'<sup>166</sup> The metaphorical character of a model is reflected in its "'is" and "is not"' quality--'an assertion is made but as a likely account rather than a definition.'<sup>167</sup> This feature allows for the 'symbiotic relationship between image and concept, between the language of prayer and liturgy and the language of theory and doctrine.'<sup>168</sup> Wentzel van Huyssteen, in agreement with McFague, suggests that 'an essential link exists between metaphors and models, since both produce creative and exploratory proposals for new designs or interpretations.' Thus, 'models may be said to function as extended and systematized metaphors in terms of which things are explained.'<sup>169</sup> Ian Barbour notes that models function 'neither as literal pictures nor

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<sup>165</sup>Cf. Owen C. Thomas and Ellen K. Wondra (*Introduction to Theology*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. [Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2002], 122) for a somewhat similar assessment.

<sup>166</sup>Sallie McFague, *Models of God*, 34.

<sup>167</sup>Sallie McFague, *Models of God*, 33.

<sup>168</sup>Sallie McFague, *Models of God*, 32-33.

<sup>169</sup>Van Huyssteen, *Justification of Faith*, 138.

as useful fictions, but as partial symbolic representations of what cannot be directly observed.<sup>170</sup> This explanatory feature of models correlates with the meaning-making function of worldviews. Thus, one might adapt van Huyssteen's argument here, and suggest that a model of providence, as part of one's worldview, 'control[s] and regulate[s] the way we reflect on God and humanity, and on the multifaceted relationship between God and humanity.'<sup>171</sup> John McIntyre, for example, has developed a multifaceted definition of 'the love of God' which serves as 'an integrating theme or principle' (or model) by which to view all the other doctrines in a systematic theology.<sup>172</sup>

A model is not only 'a metaphor with staying power,' but can also name an integrated matrix of beliefs and practices (a tradition) which forms a coherent whole. This 'whole' or model then serves as an interpretative framework for evaluating various kinds of experience. This explanatory function of models reflects their ability to 'form a critical link between the language of religious experience and the theoretic plane of theological reflection.'<sup>173</sup>

In light of these considerations, perhaps one need not radically segregate the categories 'model' and 'doctrine.' Rather, they can be thought of as different, but related, *levels* of 'extended . . . metaphors,' the first being more comprehensive and complex, the latter as nested within the first, but having a symbiotic relation with the larger model.

Van Huyssteen goes so far as to equate worldview with the concept of 'root metaphor.' At the same time, however, he also uses 'root metaphor' to identify 'the essence of a religion.' For example, he suggests 'salvation in Jesus Christ' as the root or 'basic metaphor of our Christian faith.'<sup>174</sup> Apparently the term 'root

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<sup>170</sup>Barbour, Religion, 49; cf. *ibid.*, 45.

<sup>171</sup>Van Huyssteen, Justification of Faith, 139.

<sup>172</sup>John McIntyre, On the Love of God (London, UK: Collins, 1962), 35.

<sup>173</sup>Van Huyssteen, Justification of Faith, 183; cf. *ibid.*, 182. Ian Barbour develops a similar view (Religion, 46).

<sup>174</sup>Van Huyssteen, Justification of Faith, 140, 141.

metaphor' functions here as that which best defines the non-reducible distinctives of one's model of faith.

Terrance Tiessen understands 'worldview,' 'system of theology,' and a theological position as categories synonymous with 'model.' As such, they are 'metaphysical systems' pulling 'together a number of theories (about causation, time, knowledge, freedom, power, agency, etc.)' into a coherent whole. He further explains, however, that 'these models also function as theories within the picture that constitutes our metaphysical model. They are part of the larger picture that constitutes our overarching concept of reality.'<sup>175</sup> This view of the nature and role of models seems to reflect their metaphorical and explanatory function (as noted by van Huyssteen), as well as something of the multiple levels to which the category 'model' can apply.

For the purposes of this thesis, perhaps worldview or 'metaphysical model'<sup>176</sup> can be thought of as the largest (broadest) category of model, an example of which would be Deism. Within the larger category of worldview, one's system of theology demarcates a more narrowly defined level of model. An example might be a particular version of Deism, such as Maurice Wiles' neo-Deism. A system of theology, viewed as an integrated whole, can also embody stories, doctrines and beliefs, but is more carefully and conceptually defined than worldview. The criterial role such a system plays in what one can say about his or her experience of the world and of God's relation to it, also plays a more prominent role at this level.

Within this system of theology is an even narrower level of model, namely, individual doctrines. At this level the concept of 'model' is especially applicable to more complex doctrines such as a doctrine of providence or a doctrine of God. Here the conceptual clarity is even more explicit than in worldview or system of theology, and yet they retain their metaphorical quality, functioning as 'extended and systematized metaphors in terms of which things are explained.'<sup>177</sup> Even in this category there are different levels of complexity. For example, a doctrine of

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<sup>175</sup>Tiessen, Providence and Prayer, 20.

<sup>176</sup>Tiessen, Providence and Prayer, 20.

<sup>177</sup>Van Huyssteen, Justification of Faith, 138.

providence can function as a precise rule in understanding how God acts in the world, or as a shorthand expression for the system of theology or worldview in which it is embodied. This ability to function at several levels of model at once, accounts for the sometimes ambiguous way a doctrine of providence can also be referred to as either a 'theology' or a 'model' (with 'model' here understood as either worldview or system of theology).

Thus a worldview, system of theology, or doctrine each functions at its level as a dominant explanatory metaphor. Each category of model has a metaphorical quality, functions as an interpretative grid or theory, and has (or embodies) the conceptual belief status of a doctrine.

In view of a doctrine of providence's connection to one's worldview, and its meaning-making role in relation to viewing history as an important locus of God's involvement in the human world, it is important to clarify how the concept 'history' is being used in this thesis. 'History' will be understood in the broad sense of 'a flow of events in time and space,' rather than in the more specific sense of 'the written record of the flow of events.'<sup>178</sup>

This thesis also assumes that 'human existence is essentially historical,' and as such 'is a becoming which expresses itself in time and space, in the history of the world.' Furthermore, each human is a socially constructed being.<sup>179</sup> It is this organic unity of the history of humanity (and the cosmos), as ultimately governed by God, which constitutes a doctrine of providence as *a context of meaning for history* as such.

In addition, humans, as historically situated creatures, seem to invest a great deal of their energy in making meaning out of, or understanding, their experiences of the world. Richard John Neuhaus states that 'people--all people, we may assume--are meaning-asking and meaning-making creatures.'<sup>180</sup> Developmental

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<sup>178</sup>John Sailhamer, An Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 51-52; cf. 54-72.

<sup>179</sup>Jacques Dupuis, S.J., Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 317.

<sup>180</sup>Richard John Neuhaus, 'From Providence to Privacy: Religion and the Redefinition of America,' in Unsecular America, ed. Richard John Neuhaus, Encounter Series (Grand Rapids, MI:

psychologist Robert Kegan argues that humans of all cultures share in a meaning-making process that produces an ever better grasp on reality.<sup>181</sup> It is an assumption of this thesis that a doctrine of providence, as part of one's worldview, plays an essential role in understanding one's existence as God's creature.

Since a doctrine of providence plays a complex role as a model of the God-world relation, as well as having a hermeneutical function in one's worldview, this thesis treats it as a key model. This methodological decision, while not minimising the important differences in presuppositions behind the different theologies of providence, will allow them to be analysed according to general criteria which apply to all Christian models of providence. This decision is already justified in part because each of the authors reviewed here has either written a systematic treatment of the doctrine<sup>182</sup> (two of which are actually part of a fully developed systematic theology),<sup>183</sup> or they have written what they refer to as a theology of providence.<sup>184</sup>

It would seem, therefore, that the concepts of worldview, history, meaning, God and models of providence are inseparably linked. Moreover, the orthodox claim that the Christian God is triune adds another dimension to the discussion, and will in fact constitute a material criterion in assessing models of providence. First, however, it is necessary to suggest some formal rules for working with models.

### **CRITERIA OF ANALYSIS**

Three of the functions served by a traditional doctrine of providence (that is, as defining God's role in history, and in this way giving history a context of meaning, and therefore hope) will serve as the main foci of interest in the review of

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William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., in cooperation with The Rockford Institute Center on Religion and Society, 1986), 54.

<sup>181</sup>Robert Kegan, The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 31, 294; cf. also 4, 43, 44, 107, 108, 293. Maurice Wiles refers to the 'search for meaning' as a 'fundamental human process' (God's Action, 81).

<sup>182</sup>Maurice Wiles, God's Action; Langdon Gilkey, Reaping.

<sup>183</sup>Wolfhart Pannenberg, Systematic, vol. 2; Jürgen Moltmann, Trinity and Creation, and God in Creation (although Moltmann also addresses providence in his other works as well).

<sup>184</sup>Paul Helm, Providence; John Sanders, Risks.

the models of providence in the following chapters. The challenge presented to such an overview and assessment of theologies of providence is twofold: first, how to compare doctrines and models which have been constructed upon the basis of very different sets of hermeneutical, theological and philosophical presuppositions; second, how to mark out an area of investigation which, while taking cognisance of many other important issues, engages a narrow set of questions without arbitrarily treating them out of context. In order to facilitate these goals, the following criteria are suggested for working with, and assessing, theological models.

Many of those who maintain a belief in some form of providence do so upon the basis of a reasonable faith commitment. As part of a rationally held system of theology, a doctrine of providence will have a role similar to that of an accepted theory in science. John Puddefoot claims that both scientists and theologians are first convinced of the “rightness” of a theory or doctrine (but *not compelled* to believe by “objective” evidence) and then they ‘start to want it to be true and start to look at the evidence in a way that will allow the evidence to corroborate it. Without that prior conviction the evidence does not really have a chance.’<sup>185</sup> While such a rationality model could be accused of being another form of wish-fulfilment, it seems that Puddefoot does believe in a reality that transcends the observer. The points of relevance here for a discussion of providence consist, first, in the recognition that one’s doctrine of providence will ultimately be most convincing to those who already agree on an understanding of the Christian God, and second, those views of providence which most adequately account for the varied data of the Christian faith and human experience will prove the more credible.<sup>186</sup>

This highlights the fact that each theologian has made a choice of a model of the Christian faith with which he or she can identify, the one which seems most

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<sup>185</sup> John Puddefoot, ‘Response by John Puddefoot,’ in *Science and Theology: Questions at the Interface*, eds. Murray Rae, Hilary Regan, and John Stenhouse (Edinburgh, U.K.: T. and T. Clark Ltd; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 143; cf. *ibid.*, 141.

<sup>186</sup> Of course, the ‘data’ itself is theory-laden, and there are wide divergences within the Christian tradition as to what constitutes orthodox belief (cf. Ian Barbour, *Religion*, 33). Each person, however, will have to decide which elements of the faith are essential to the core of his or her faith, and then from that basis assess the relative merits of each model of providence.



intellectually and experientially adequate.<sup>187</sup> The theologians reviewed in the following chapters are already working from a prescriptive set of assumptions about God, the Christian scriptures, and the nature of the world and of God's relation to it, provided by the tradition from within which they work. This means, in turn, that an assessment of a theologian's treatment of a particular doctrine must address the context of that doctrine as comprised by his or her whole 'theological position.'<sup>188</sup> Adapting these insights to the focus of this thesis, one might ask how each theological position treats the traditional functions of a doctrine of providence, and also what role the doctrine plays in the theologian's present belief system or worldview.

By thinking of one's doctrine of providence as a faith commitment to an explanatory model of the God-world relation, it is now possible to propose some general criteria which can be applied to a given model. Ian Barbour suggests that successful models have three characteristics: they are analogical, have fertility, and form an intelligible unit.<sup>189</sup> In keeping with these features, he recommends four criteria for assessing models: 1) agreement with data; 2) coherence; 3) scope; and 4) fertility.<sup>190</sup>

### Formal Criteria

These criteria are formal in the sense that, with some adaptation, they can be applied to any model or theory.

In the first criterion, 'agreement with data,' Barbour notes that 'religious beliefs must provide a faithful rendition of the areas of experience that are taken by the community to be especially significant.' He understands the 'primary data' to consist of 'individual religious experience and communal story and ritual.' While he rightly suggests that 'here the data are much more theory-laden than in the case of science,'<sup>191</sup> I would add that for many in the Christian community there is a certain

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<sup>187</sup>Cf. David H. Kelsey's treatment of model choice (*The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (London, UK: SCM Press, 1975), 182; cf. *ibid.*, 177, 163, 160, 136, 137-138.

<sup>188</sup>Kelsey, *Uses of Scripture*, 136.

<sup>189</sup>Barbour, *Religion*, 41-42.

<sup>190</sup>Barbour, *Religion*, 38-39.

<sup>191</sup>Barbour, *Religion*, 38.

givenness about the Christian scriptures. Although the scope of this thesis does not allow an elaboration and defence of this position, in the present thesis I will assume this givenness of the authority of the Christian scriptures as part of the data which a doctrine of providence must take into account. At a minimal level, the authority of these scriptures derive from their role as the basis for the Christian community's identity. As David Kelsey says, they shape 'the common life of the Christian community. "These texts are authority for the church's common life' is analytic in "These texts are the church's scripture."'<sup>192</sup> This claim, or a rebuttal of it, will influence the status and role each theologian accords the Christian scriptures as a source of data for understanding providence. Thus the 'data' which a model of providence needs to take into account includes (in no particular order) the Christian community's private and corporate religious experiences, the Christian scriptures, and the full range of one's experience of the world.

Moreover, while many theologians continue to take seriously the importance of a doctrine of providence, they do not agree on whether to keep the traditional form, revise the tradition, or on how much revision may be required. But the traditional forms of the doctrine themselves constitute an important segment of the data current models must take into account.

In the second criterion, coherence, the key idea is that of 'consistency with other accepted beliefs.'<sup>193</sup> Perhaps the greatest threat to the coherence of any doctrine of providence is in accounting for the problem of evil, but other inconsistencies can arise as well: in how one tries to resolve the relation between divine sovereignty and human freedom; in the relation between present history and the eschaton; and in the way one uses scripture to defend a particular view of God.

Barbour sees the third criterion, scope, as the locus for extending the interpretative role of religious beliefs 'beyond the primary data' to include 'other aspects of our personal and social lives.' Moreover, 'in a scientific age, they must

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<sup>192</sup>Kelsey, *Uses of Scripture*, 89.

<sup>193</sup>Barbour, *Religion*, 38.

also at least be consistent with the findings of science.’ In this way ‘religious beliefs can contribute to a coherent world view and a comprehensive metaphysics.’<sup>194</sup>

This criterion can be broadened slightly to analyse how each author defines providence, delimits it, and uses it (the issues of definition, scope, and function). Three questions can be asked in this connection. First, the definitional question: of what does the author understand the doctrine of providence to consist? An important but distinct aspect of this definitional question raises a second question, the problem of limits or scope: *how many* (or few) issues does the author include within the locus of the doctrine in order to construct a coherent and comprehensive theological model? Third, there is the question of function: what role does the author see the doctrine playing in a systematics, and in the life of the faith community? Treatments of providence do not always give clear answers to these questions, but they are at least implicit in the explication of each model.

In the present study the fourth criterion, ‘fertility,’ operates at more than one level. For example, ‘at the personal level,’ says Barbour, ‘religious beliefs can be judged by their power to effect personal transformation and the integration of personality.’<sup>195</sup> Each model of providence purports to be more adequate than other such paradigms as a means of ordering one’s life in the most prudent manner.

There is, however, another important level of fertility. As noted above, a doctrine is a theorised form of a religious belief or practice. As a model, it is a metaphor with staying power, a root metaphor. As part of its metaphorical role, it not only enables the interpretation of data, but also enables new insights.<sup>196</sup> These can be insights with regard to the world and life in general, or with respect to the concept of providence itself. New ways of thinking about God, and about humans in relation to God, can lead to new insights about the human situation. Barbour agrees with Ernan McMullin that ‘a good model . . . is not a dispensable temporary

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<sup>194</sup>Barbour, Religion, 39.

<sup>195</sup>Barbour, Religion, 39.

<sup>196</sup>According to Bernard J. Lee, S.M., ‘metaphor is not an interpretation after the fact, but an enabler of fact in the first place and even a constitutive feature of fact’ (‘An “Other” Trinity,’ in Trinity in Process: A Relational Theology of God, eds. Joseph A. Bracken, S.J., and Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki [New York, NY: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1997], 192); John Sanders notes that metaphors ‘afford fresh insights’ (Risks, 17).

expedient but a fruitful and open-ended source of continuing ideas for possible extensions and modifications. Like a poetic metaphor, it offers tentative suggestions for exploring a new domain.<sup>197</sup> This feature of models is related to the aesthetic quality of a theological position taken as a whole,<sup>198</sup> to the hermeneutical function of one's worldview, and to the function of a model of providence in enabling one to see new options in the God-world relationship.

While these four formal criteria can be applied to many religious models, the fact that the models reviewed in this thesis are *Christian* doctrines of providence suggests the necessity of a material criterion.

### Material Criterion

One of the pieces of "data" a model of providence must account for is the Christian form of a doctrine of God. If, as argued above, the Christian God is triune, then it can be asked further whether a doctrine of providence, in order to be Christian, should be in some way explicitly trinitarian.<sup>199</sup> Such a claim has not appeared to be self-evident in traditional forms of the doctrine.

On this view, the ubiquitous presence of the Trinity in a systematics is not unlike that of providence (as noted by Pope, above). While the two doctrines do not carry equal grammatical weight, their character as pervasive themes in a systematics suggests at least a formal connection between them in that they each relate directly to the other doctrines in theology, thus forming a thematic thread linking the doctrines together, as well as giving those doctrines a distinctive context which shapes their meaning. It is this feature of a doctrine of the Trinity that Pannenberg and Moltmann have followed, and which this thesis will adopt as a material criterion for a doctrine of providence.

In order to ask this question of models of providence, however, it is necessary at this point to state the present author's own working assumptions about the Trinity

<sup>197</sup>Barbour, *Religion*, 44.

<sup>198</sup>Cf. Kelsey, *Uses of Scripture*, 137-138.

<sup>199</sup>Cf. Schwöbel, 'Introduction,' *Trinitarian Theology Today*, 6; idem, *God: Action and Revelation*, 42-43; cf. also, Thomas Torrance, *Doctrine of God*, 2; Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation*, 50, 175; and Kasper, *God of Jesus*, 310-311, 313.

in order to make explicit the basis upon which the various treatments of God and providence will be evaluated. In addition to accepting its normative function as the Christian doctrine of God, this doctrine is taken to mean that the God of Christian Theism is understood as Father, Son and Holy Spirit as they constitute one God.<sup>200</sup> This minimally stated version of the doctrine, while not a fully developed doctrine of the Trinity, is more developed than New Testament references to Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It amounts to speaking of God 'in a trinitarian fashion.'<sup>201</sup> The primary focus on providence in this thesis precludes addressing many of the problems associated with a doctrine of the Trinity, and instead limits itself to asking if the authors at least speak 'in a trinitarian fashion' when constructing a doctrine of providence.

Theological models of providence, therefore, function as interpretive grids of both a theologian's inherited tradition and of his or her experience of the world, and have an accountability to the tradition within which they are formulated.<sup>202</sup> In view of the normative function of a doctrine of the Trinity, this thesis will be asking not only how each author has accounted for the triune aspect of the Christian God (an 'agreement with data' and 'coherence' issue), but also in turn how a doctrine of the Trinity influences the current shape of a doctrine of providence (a 'fertility' issue).

## CONCLUSION

As the above review highlights, a number of factors have contributed to the loss of confidence in traditional views of a doctrine of providence. Among those factors, the following seem to have especially exacerbated the credibility gap in accounting for the providential activity in history of the good and loving God of Christian theology: the apparent success of the sciences in explaining the universe in terms of natural causes alone; the influence of epistemological foundationalism

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<sup>200</sup>Claude Welch, *In this Name*, 218-219. Similarly, Thomas Torrance argues that 'God's distinctive self-revelation as Holy Trinity, One Being, Three Persons, creates the overall framework within which all Christian theology is to be formulated' (*Doctrine of God*, 2).

<sup>201</sup>Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 44-45; cf. *ibid.*, 47.

<sup>202</sup>Cf. Vincent Brümmer, *The Model of Love: A Study in Philosophical Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 20.

(modernity) and nonfoundationalism (postmodernity) on how and what one can know; modern historical consciousness; stress on human autonomy and self-creativity; the heightened consciousness of systemic evil in the world; an increasing focus on relational metaphysics; and a willingness to radically redefine the concept of God. In the face of intense doubt about either an active presence of God in history or of a divine teleology undergirding the universe, accounting for God's wise and caring relationship to the world has become a problem for many theologians. On the one hand, under the critique of Modernity belief in providence as a general structure was relinquished by many. Faith in a public providence was abandoned, leaving only private providence. On the other hand, deconstructionist post-modern critiques do not accept the validity of providence as a structure for any narrative, public or private. Thus, personal providence is brought into question.

This situation need not be interpreted to mean the significance of a doctrine of providence for Christian theology is now less, but it does mean that many of the theological, metaphysical, philosophical, and scientific assumptions upon which the more traditional (and optimistic) models of it rested, have fallen into disrepute. Thus Gilkey, in the mid-twentieth century, could rightly record a nadir in the career of the doctrine of providence.

Nevertheless, a concern to make "God" relevant, that is, present to and in human activity and history (which had been a concern of a traditional doctrines of providence), helped to fuel the Death of God Movement, lent impetus to the Biblical Theology Movement, undergirded existential theologies, continues to haunt post-modern theology, and remains a pivotal issue for speaking of providence in a contemporary context. Although some treatments of providential concerns avoid traditional terminology, they nevertheless continue to look for ways of understanding both God and God's relation to the world which sees God as intimately involved in its history, or at least as its ultimate source of meaning and hope.

Since this discussion involves *Christian* theology, one cannot avoid asking which model of God a theologian has in mind when constructing a doctrine of providence. After a long period of neglect and for reasons similar to those which led to a lack of confidence in providence, renewed interest in the Trinity is evidenced in many areas of theological discussion. For those who accept that a Christian view of



God requires a Trinity, a question is raised as to how that might influence the shape of a doctrine of providence. As the following chapters will show, some find little or no explicit relevance, while for others it requires that providence be given an explicitly trinitarian structure. Two questions arise from the issue of how (and if) the Trinity and providence should be related: first, how might a doctrine of the Trinity regulate what is said about providence; and second, do trinitarian models of providence have the potential of resolving some of the current problems with providence?

In this overview of the current state of interest in providence and the Trinity, the following key issues have surfaced: the problem of God's *presence*--if, where and how God is actively and personally present in human history; the problem of locating a source of *ultimate meaning* for individual lives and for the various contexts of historical experience; and the problem of how to conceive of God as having real relations with creation.

It is in response to various construals of these empirical, existential, conceptual and theological problems that theologians in the last half of the twentieth century have attempted to reshape the doctrines of God and of providence. This thesis will focus on what theologians have been saying about providence during this period, paying special attention to their doctrines of God.

## CHAPTER 2

### NON-TRINITARIAN THEOLOGIES OF PROVIDENCE: MAURICE WILES AND LANGDON GILKEY

#### INTRODUCTION

The authors chosen for review in this chapter serve to introduce a number of issues which will be followed throughout the thesis. First, they reinterpret a doctrine of providence in light of the key issues and concerns noted in the previous chapter that led to a loss of credibility for traditional versions of the doctrine. Wiles and Gilkey re-construct the doctrine with the aim of satisfying four broad criteria: a concern to construct a Christian doctrine of providence that can be accepted by those whose perception of the world is influenced by a scientific understanding of the world as a network of intramundane causes; a concept of God which is anti-supernaturalistic; a non-interventionist view of the God-world relation; and an understanding of historical reality as open to the truly new, and of humans as radically free.

Their methods have in common the following general features. First, they both work from within the broad paradigm of the Christian tradition. Second, they each develop a doctrine of providence based on a natural theology approach. Third, as a way of achieving this latter goal, they reduce traditional Christian doctrines to what they understand to be their essential meaning or basic purpose, and on the basis of this generic set of essential concerns, reconstruct a doctrine of providence which speaks to a modern naturalistic worldview. Although Wiles does not explicitly specify the topic of God acting in or through *history* as such, he clearly has this in mind as an assumption. Gilkey goes further, and makes the problem of God's presence and action in history the central focus and apologetic purpose of his doctrine of providence.

A final issue is the matter of their doctrines of God. Although Wiles is doing Christian theology, he both rejects a doctrine of the Trinity, and his doctrine of providence does not require a Trinity. Gilkey's model of providence develops a trinitarian framework for the doctrine, but this is a "trinity" of three essential dimensions of a monistic God's relationships with humans.

### MAURICE WILES: GOD "OUTSIDE" OF HISTORY

Wiles has been described by David Pailin as a liberal theologian.<sup>203</sup> Nancey Murphy also refers to him as an example of the liberal type of theologian. She describes the "ideal" type of 'liberal theology' as characterised by the three following, interrelated areas: epistemology (knowledge of God is rooted in religious experience); philosophy of religious language (it expresses in symbolic and metaphorical terms human experience of God); view of divine action (God does not intervene from the outside, but is immanent and active within the processes of nature and history).<sup>204</sup> Although Wiles does not fit the type as easily as Murphy suggests,<sup>205</sup> these general categories do serve to capture the major contours of his approach to doing theology.

Wiles sees the Christian theologian as situated in the tension between the worldview and doctrinal formulations of the past, and the worldview and concerns of his or her contemporary culture. The theologian's task is to mediate between these two worlds, and in the process answer the question: '[W]hat then should Christians say today?'<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>203</sup>David Pailin, 'Maurice Wiles: Profile of a Liberal Theologian,' Epworth Review 21, no. 1 (January 1994): 33-42.

<sup>204</sup>Nancey Murphy, Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 6-7, 77-80.

<sup>205</sup>See below under the heading, 'Neo-Deism,' re. Wiles' view of indirect divine action regarding human affairs.

<sup>206</sup>Wiles, What is Theology? (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1976), 47.

**WILES' THEOLOGICAL AGENDA**

This apologetic concern bears the primary responsibility for Wiles' positing of a non-interventionist view of God's relation to the world.<sup>207</sup> This model of the God-world relation in turn determines his approach to theology in general, and to the doctrines of God, the Trinity, incarnation, resurrection and providence in particular.

Wiles adopts a bottom-up approach to doing theology, and as such his ruling criterion for theological construction is 'our ordinary experience' of the world. Based on his interpretation of what that experience 'requires us to say',<sup>208</sup> a God who intervenes in the affairs of the world in terms of an efficient causality is incompatible with a scientific view of the way the world works,<sup>209</sup> inconsistent with a loving impartial God,<sup>210</sup> and irreconcilable with the requirements of human freedom.<sup>211</sup> He then sets about reconstructing the more traditional formulations of Christian doctrine to fit with these criteria.

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<sup>207</sup>While this thesis will argue for a stronger version of divine-human interaction than Wiles allows, it agrees with Wiles in his view that the concept of 'interventionist' models of the God-world relation are inadequate if they imply intermittent divine abrogation of the very regularities of creation which God has established. Cf. an argument to the same effect by William Stoeger, S.J. ('Describing God's Action in the World in Light of Scientific Knowledge of Reality,' in Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., eds. Robert John Russell, Nancey Murphy, and Arthur Peacocke, A Series on 'Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action,' ed. Robert John Russell (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications; Berkeley, CA: The Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 1997), 249.

<sup>208</sup>Wiles, The Remaking of Christian Doctrine (London, UK: SCM Press Ltd., 1974; repr., London, UK: XPRESS REPRINTS, SCM Bookroom, 1994), 37.

<sup>209</sup>Wiles, Remaking, 37-8; Wiles, 'Providence,' Epworth Review 21, no. 1 (January, 1994): 78.

<sup>210</sup>Wiles, 'Divine Action: Some Moral Considerations,' in The God Who Acts: Philosophical and Theological Explorations, ed. Thomas Tracy (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 22-3; idem, 'Providence,' 79-80.

<sup>211</sup>Wiles, 'Divine Action,' 22; Wiles, God's Action in the World, The Bampton Lectures for 1986 (London, UK: SCM Press Ltd., 1986; Reissued by XPRESS REPRINTS SCM Bookroom, London, UK, 1993), 54, 104; Remaking, 136; cf. God's Action, 90, 6, 26, 36, 38, 62, 80, 93, 108. Cf. George F. R. Ellis' similar view ('The Theology of the Anthropic Principle,' in Quantum Cosmology and the Laws of Nature: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., A series on 'Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action' [Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications; Berkeley, CA: The Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 1993, 1996], 384, 385).

## EPISTEMOLOGY AND ONTOLOGY

Wiles' non-interventionist view of God forces him to take bottom-up approach to theology, which in turn exerts an important influence on his view of *how* and *what* one can know about God, God's purposes, and God's providential action. A fundamental presupposition for Wiles is that the only access to knowledge about God is 'through the totality of man's lived experience.'<sup>212</sup> In the absence of direct divine interventions, it follows that there are no divine revelations as traditionally understood, but only one's coming to recognise God's purposes in the world. This naturalistic approach becomes the ruling criterion against which Wiles tests all claims to adequacy and coherence in Christian doctrines.<sup>213</sup>

Wiles takes seriously the fact that 'ever since the time of Kant, theologians have been acutely aware of the extreme difficulty of reasoning from experience of the world to affirmation about a transcendent God.'<sup>214</sup> He rejects, however, the Barthian response to this dilemma, because in the end it too receives its revelation only through the 'medium' of ordinary experience.<sup>215</sup> But neither does Wiles allow himself to be forced into atheism. Although claims to knowledge of God as transcendent creator can never achieve certainty,<sup>216</sup> and one can never talk about the nature of God in himself beyond making some calculated inferences based on one's experience of the way the world is, he or she may come to know *something* about God through the indirect means of his or her 'ordinary experience of the world,'<sup>217</sup> since the world is understood to be the result of *God's* creative activity.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>212</sup>Wiles, *Remaking*, 27.

<sup>213</sup>Cf. Wiles, *Remaking*, 113, 112.

<sup>214</sup>Wiles, *Remaking*, 22.

<sup>215</sup>Wiles, *Remaking*, 24; cf. Wiles, *What is Theology?*, 45-46.

<sup>216</sup>Pailin, 'Maurice Wiles,' 36-7. Cf. Wiles, *Faith and the Mystery of God* (London, UK: SCM Press Ltd., 1982), 29, 70, 129; and idem, 'The Role of a Critical Theology in the Church Today,' chap. in *Explorations in Theology* 4 (London, UK: SCM Press Ltd., 1979), 12.

<sup>217</sup>Wiles, *Remaking*, 25.

<sup>218</sup>Wiles, *Remaking*, 29; cf. *ibid.*, 25-26, 26. Cf. also, Wiles, 'Divine Action,' 26, 27.

Wiles is adopting the epistemological constraints of the naturalistic presuppositions of a scientific worldview, and then using the data seen with these glasses to positively limit what one can claim to know about God, and yet he is still wanting to make claims which go beyond what science allows. Of course, one can concede to Wiles that if one works from the basis of a naturalistic understanding of evolutionary theory, it is not irrational to conclude that there is ‘a basic “directionality” to the evolutionary process.’<sup>219</sup> Such a conclusion is compatible with Wiles’ insistence that there is a built-in “grain” in the evolutionary process. One might say, therefore, ‘if there is “purposiveness without purpose” in natural history, then the Christian language of divine guidance and care may find at least a handhold within the biological sciences.’ Nevertheless, as Wesley Wildman insists, one cannot ‘use evolutionary biology either to prove or to disprove theism.’<sup>220</sup> But to go further, and affirm such particular religious claims as the existence of the *Christian* creator God, or of the immortality of the human soul, is to reach conclusions not supported by any purely scientific understanding of the world. Thus, in order to do theology, Wiles finds himself forced to exceed the very limits he claims a naturalistic, scientific worldview imposes on theologians.

In spite of his agnosticism about how much one can know about God, Wiles avoids a Feuerbachian version of the God-world relation through his theological realism--the loving creator God of Christian theism does exist.<sup>221</sup> Even though his epistemology is rooted in an experiential foundationalism, it is a foundationalism that sees one’s ordinary experience of the world as the medium *through* which one comes into contact with reality, with what is there. Part of what one comes in contact with is a feeling of ‘absolute dependence’ (Schleiermacher), of ‘ultimate concern’ (Tillich).<sup>222</sup> Wiles is ready to admit that faith may very well be mistaken about calling that reality “God,” that what one thinks is an encounter with God may rest

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<sup>219</sup>Philip Clayton, ‘Biology Meets Theology,’ Christian Century (19 January 2000): 64. [61-64].

<sup>220</sup>Wildman, quoted by Clayton, ‘Biology Meets Theology,’ 64, 63.

<sup>221</sup>Cf. Wiles, A Shared Search: Doing Theology in Conversation with One’s Friends (London, UK: SCM Press Ltd., 1994), 13; cf. also, Wiles, Faith and Mystery, 12.

<sup>222</sup>Wiles, Remaking, 26-7.



after all on a misapprehension of some psychological aspect of one's being.<sup>223</sup> But, he is not willing to stop there, since for him the concept of God serves as the best explanation of our origins and ultimate end. To this extent belief in God reflects a true state of affairs. He therefore wishes to argue that 'if the concept of God is of such crucial practical significance as Kaufman claims, then it would be strange if it were nothing more than a useful instrument toward human living and corresponded in no way to the ultimate reality of how our world is.'<sup>224</sup>

In keeping with his theological realism, therefore, Wiles is not advocating that one reductionistically call his or her own limit experiences "God" (a Feuerbachian move).<sup>225</sup> Rather, he is advocating a recognition that in one's 'feeling of absolute dependence,' or 'feeling of ultimate concern,' *God* is the 'reality of which we are aware,' a reality 'which we cannot know by any other route.'<sup>226</sup> Thus, the epistemological limits within which Wiles works, combined with his insistence that "God" refers to the objective reality of Christian theism, determines what he can say about the God-world relation.

### **THE GOD-WORLD RELATION**

These theological presuppositions have convinced Wiles to develop a neo-deistic view of the God-world relation.

### **Neo-Deism**

Contemporary Christian theologians who are *deist* in their view of the God-world relation, and who have also sought to develop a doctrine of providence, are few and far between. Beyond the obvious fact that the very definition of *deism*

<sup>223</sup>Wiles, *Faith and Mystery*, 11.

<sup>224</sup>Maurice F. Wiles, 'Can Theology Still Be About God?', in *Theology at the End of Modernity*, ed. Sheila Greeve Davaney (Philadelphia, PA: Trinity Press International, 1991), 231 (Also in Maurice Wiles, *A Shared Search: Doing Theology in Conversation with One's Friends* [London, UK: SCM Press Ltd., 1994], 152).

<sup>225</sup>Cf. Wiles, *Remaking*, 27.

<sup>226</sup>Wiles, *Remaking*, 26-27. Cf. Wiles, 'Can Theology Still Be About God?', 231; cf. also Wiles, 'Belief, Openness and Religious Commitment,' *Theology* 101, no. 801 (May/June 1998): 170-171.

entails an uninvolved, radically transcendent God, a contributing factor to the scarcity of deistic models of providence may be due in part to the current popularity of more immanentist views of the God-world relation.<sup>227</sup> Those theologians who do favour deistic *emphases* in their models of the God-world relation include Maurice Wiles, Arthur Peacocke, and Gordon Kaufman. None of these authors are deists in the classical sense, as each is concerned to show that God is in some way in active relationship to the universe, but each emphasises the transcendence of God in such a way as to lend elements of deism to his model of the God-world relation.

Arthur Peacocke's model is actually panentheistic, but he especially stresses God's independence and transcendence.<sup>228</sup> Like Wiles, he insists that because of God's self-limitations God does not intervene in the operation of the world by means of special providences and miracles (traditionally understood), since these kinds of action would 'abrogate the scientifically observed relationships operating at the level of the events in question.'<sup>229</sup> God's presence to the world is uniform at all times and places, and any variation in the perceived "revelation" of God's purposes disclosed in particular events is the result of variation in human *awareness* of these purposes.<sup>230</sup> Peacocke differs from Wiles in that he takes a stronger view of God's interaction with the world through God's granting of information and therefore insight through observed "providential patterns."<sup>231</sup> Wiles rejects Peacocke's

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<sup>227</sup>Cf. D. Bloesch, A Theology of Word and Spirit: Authority and Method in Theology, vol. 1, Christian Foundations (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 250; and Stanley Grenz, and Roger Olson, Twentieth Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992).

<sup>228</sup>Peacocke, Theology for a Scientific Age: Being and Becoming--Natural, Divine and Human, enlarged edition (London, UK: SCM Press Ltd., 1990), 158-9, 370-72, n. 75.

<sup>229</sup>Peacocke, Theology, 121-123, 182, 183; cf. Wiles, Remaking, 37-8.

<sup>230</sup>Peacocke, Theology, 181; cf. Wiles, God's Action, 81, 89.

<sup>231</sup>Peacocke, Theology, 165; cf. *ibid.*, 161, 164, 370, n. 62; and *idem*, 'The Sound of Sheer Silence: How Does God Communicate with Humanity?', in Neuroscience and the Person: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action, eds. Robert J. Russell, Nancey Murphy, Theo C. Meyering, and Michael A. Arbib, A Series on 'Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action,' ed. Robert John Russell (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications; Berkeley, CA: The Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 1999), 234-245. Diogenes Allen also appeals to 'the patterns made by events in nature, history, and individual lives' as the means by which 'we are able to discern God's providential activity' (Christian Belief in a Postmodern World: The Full Wealth of Conviction [Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989], 174).

model of “top-down” causation as too general or ‘gradual’ to produce ‘the [traditional] kind of providential control that we have been considering.’<sup>232</sup>

Another view of God’s relation to the world bearing some similarities to Wiles’ is that of Gordon Kaufman. In this model the world is seen as a single creative act of God, but as a master act containing many sub-acts.<sup>233</sup> Thomas Tracy notes that Kaufman maintains that God does not act specifically *in* history (which includes the whole created order). Kaufman instead locates ‘all of God’s activity at the foundation of the world process, as an act of laying down its essential structure of laws of development.’ God achieves God’s overall purpose through a series of sub-acts which are still part of the initial structure given to the universe. Kaufman does, however, allow that ‘God’s sub-acts are sometimes “responsive to our acts.”’<sup>234</sup> Although Wiles notes his indebtedness to Kaufman for this depiction of God’s creative act, he distinguishes his treatment from Kaufman’s in that he has ‘not followed Kaufman in speaking of God performing any of the sub-acts which together contribute to God’s one act of creating our world.’<sup>235</sup> At the same time, however, for both Wiles and Kaufman, the unity of God’s creative act rules out any special divine interventions.<sup>236</sup>

While there are similarities between Wiles’ model of the God-world relation and eighteenth century deism (in which God created the world, designed it to run independently according to the laws God built into it, and then left it to its own devices), this traditional version of deism does not quite capture Wiles’ theological position. Aside from the fact that Wiles explicitly claims to be working with ‘the

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<sup>232</sup>Wiles, ‘Providence,’ 79.

<sup>233</sup>See Gordon Kaufman, ‘On the Meaning of “Act of God,”’ in God’s Activity in the World: The Contemporary Problem, ed. Owen Thomas (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983).

<sup>234</sup>Thomas Tracy, ‘Enacting History: Ogden and Kaufman on God’s Mighty Acts,’ The Journal of Religion 64, no. 1 (January 1984): 25, 26, 27.

<sup>235</sup>Wiles, God’s Action, 96, 97; cf. Kaufman, Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective (New York, NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1968), 303. In Kaufman’s more recent work he has become much more agnostic about the referent behind the symbol ‘God.’ For this reason Wiles notes that his own project speaks of God in more ‘personalistic terms’ than Kaufman would want to use (Shared Search, 13).

<sup>236</sup>Cf. Wiles, Remaking, 37-8.

creator God of Christian theism,<sup>237</sup> the main difference between classical deism and his own view is that the created universe for Wiles is not simply established by God and then abandoned, but rather is a single act encompassing the whole, and as such amounts to a continuous creation.<sup>238</sup> This allows for God's presence to the world to be 'all-pervasive,' but only in the sense that God gives it existence and general purpose.<sup>239</sup> For this reason, Wiles' theological system as a whole must be classed as a theist position. His self-admitted deist tendencies, however, allow him to be placed in the neo-deist category. The intent here is to capture the idea of God's self-imposed, non-interference with the created universe, other than sustaining its natural laws of operations.<sup>240</sup> In one sense, every aspect of creation is in constant and absolute dependence upon God's creative and sustaining activity, but in another sense God's transcendence is strictly maintained since the creation has been endowed with its own purpose and built-in teleology, its own emergent properties.<sup>241</sup>

As a result of this emphasis on God's transcendence and restricted level of involvement with the created processes, Wiles' view of the God-world relation in general, and of the Christian doctrine of providence in particular, has been referred to as, 'tacitly deist,'<sup>242</sup> "continuous deism,"<sup>243</sup> a 'deistic sort of Christianity,'<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>237</sup>Wiles, Remaking, 27.

<sup>238</sup>Wiles, God's Action, 107-108, 48; cf. Wiles, 'Divine Action,' 24-25; and Wiles, Remaking, 38, 34. Thomas Tracy's summary of Schleiermacher's view of providence as an aspect of continuous creation bears a striking resemblance to Wiles' model ('Particular Providence and the God of the Gaps,' in Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., eds. Robert John Russell, Nancey Murphy, and Arthur Peacocke, A Series on 'Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action,' ed. Robert John Russell [Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications; Berkeley, CA: The Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 1997]), 295-304.

<sup>239</sup>Wiles, Faith and Mystery, 12; cf. *ibid.*, 24; Wiles, Remaking, 38.

<sup>240</sup>Wiles, God's Action, 21-22.

<sup>241</sup>Wiles, God's Action, 34.

<sup>242</sup>Daniel Hardy, 'Theology Through Philosophy,' in The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. David F. Ford (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc.; Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1997), 256.

<sup>243</sup>Helm, Providence, 76.

<sup>244</sup>Helen Oppenheimer, review of God's Action in the World, by Maurice Wiles, in The Journal of Theological Studies 38 (1987): 583.

having a resemblance to 'quasi-deism',<sup>245</sup> and as a 'new deism' or 'continuism'.<sup>246</sup> The reason for this impression lies in Wiles' insistence that God, creating the world as a whole out of nothing (*ex nihilo*),<sup>247</sup> does not intervene directly in its affairs by means of particular divine action.<sup>248</sup> He accepts, for instance, the concept of God's activity as 'primary causation' in relation to the physical universe.<sup>249</sup> This is similar to Brian Hebblethwaite's adaptation of Farrer's use of double agency in which God adopts a constant and consistent action toward creation with the effect that all non-divine entities are 'teleologically ordered' in such a way that God's hidden action makes 'them make themselves'.<sup>250</sup>

As Wiles understands a scientific description of the world, God cannot be thought to intervene or interact in the web of finite causal forces and events,<sup>251</sup> and as a result of this 'modern world-view,' the contemporary theologian cannot adopt many of the 'various cultural assumptions characteristic of the ancient world' of the Bible.<sup>252</sup> That means there were no miracles marking significant stages of salvation history: no divinely engineered Exodus, no incarnation of a divine Son, no resurrection of Jesus from the dead.<sup>253</sup> This non-interventionist view of God is extended even to the level of communication: God does not grant special revelations

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<sup>245</sup>Roy Kearsley, review of *God's Action in the World*, by Maurice Wiles, in *The Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 6, no. 2 (Autumn 1988): 129.

<sup>246</sup>Richard Sturch, review of *God's Action in the World*, by Maurice Wiles, in *Themelios* (Oct./Nov. 1987): 30; idem, *The New Deism* (Bristol, UK: The Bristol Press, 1990), 3.

<sup>247</sup>Wiles, *Remaking*, 33; Wiles maintains that 'there can be no going back on that conviction [i.e., of creation *ex nihilo*] for the Christian theologian. In my judgement it is both philosophically and religiously essential. Creation is creation out of nothing or it is nothing.' Any other God would be a dispensable hypothesis (*God's Action*, 16).

<sup>248</sup>Wiles, *God's Action*, 62; cf. *ibid.*, 34, 34-5, 92-3. Wiles, *Remaking*, 38.

<sup>249</sup>Wiles, *God's Action*, 34.

<sup>250</sup>Brian Hebblethwaite, 'Providence and Divine Action,' *Religious Studies* 14, no. 2 (June 1978): 229. However, Hebblethwaite's model seems to imply a kind of top-down supervenience concept of the God-world relation on the analogy of the relation between human mind and brain, which would constitute a too direct type of divine action for Wiles.

<sup>251</sup>Wiles, 'Providence,' 78.

<sup>252</sup>Wiles, *What is Theology?*, 5.

<sup>253</sup>Cf. Wiles, 'Providence,' 78.

of himself to either particular groups of people or to individuals--to do so would be to show an arbitrary favouritism. This is the most important reason for which Wiles rejects a traditional view of providence.

### Divine Action and Providence

Although Wiles recognises a distinction between a doctrine of providence and the topic of divine action,<sup>254</sup> he often blurs the distinction. His non-interventionist view of the God-world relation is the main reason for this. It may fairly be asked whether Wiles ever develops a doctrine of providence at all, or deals instead only with the narrower philosophical issue of divine action.<sup>255</sup> In his article, 'Providence,' he evaluates some of the central claims of 'older understandings of providence'<sup>256</sup> and finds them wanting. He so limits God's direct action to the single and continuous creative act of the whole he is forced by logical necessity to deny that 'God's providential activity . . . is operative *at all* in ordering how events in the world turn out.'<sup>257</sup> With that conclusion one must say his model of the God-world relation embodies only a very attenuated view of providence.

It seems clear that for Wiles 'divine action' describes God creative role, while 'providence' serves the religious function of referring, not to a specific act or activity of God, but to a 'retroactive' assessment of the *religious* significance of *one's experience* of the world as the effect of God's creative act.<sup>258</sup> Thus, the character of Wiles' understanding of these terms reflects a radical remaking of their traditional meaning, and in turn requires a radical remaking of most of the rest of Christian doctrines if they are going to be made consistent with his neo-deistic view of the God-world relation. It is a matter of some relevance to the focus of this thesis that

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<sup>254</sup>Wiles, *God's Action*, chap. 5; cf. *ibid.*, 82.

<sup>255</sup>Contrary to the approach adopted in this thesis, Wiles sees the concept of divine action to be the more fundamental problem affecting the credibility of faith in providence than the concept of providence itself (*God's Action*, 82). This may be due in part to the philosophical and scientific orientation of the concept of divine action, versus the more theological focus of providence.

<sup>256</sup>Wiles, 'Providence,' 83,

<sup>257</sup>Wiles, 'Providence,' 81.

<sup>258</sup>Wiles, *God's Action*, 81, 83, 89.



this view of the God-world relation reflects a non-traditional understanding of God (unitarian versus trinitarian), and of God's action in the world (as a single act excluding particular actions).

### God as Transcendent Final Cause

This does not mean for Wiles that God is simply "apart" from the world, but it does require that talk of God's involvement in creation be limited to 'general statements about the *kind of world* God has created rather than to claims about particular, specifiable acts of God in history.'<sup>259</sup> The kind of world in mind here is populated with human beings who are radically free in *how* they respond to, and work with or against God's general purpose.

Again, this does not mean God is impersonal--God is both incorporeal and yet personal<sup>260</sup>--but neither does it logically entail (for Wiles) that a personal God be a divine agent in the particulars of the world.<sup>261</sup> For this reason Wiles is not willing to go the whole way with Farrer's notion of double agency. In the first place, this would imply that God acts on the world in the mode of 'efficient causation.' Wiles identifies this concept as 'the heart of the problem.' To speak in these terms would, for Wiles, involve a literal or non-symbolic use of symbolic language, and as such is inappropriate to the nature of religious language. Although traditionally such efficient causation language seemed appropriate for describing God's acts, today it must be rejected as 'implausible' for scientific reasons, and also as being 'religiously unsatisfactory in view of their apparently occasional and highly selective character.' This is the view that leads Wiles to reject the more traditional model of providence as involving an unfair and arbitrary manipulation of the events of the world.<sup>262</sup>

Instead, he suggests one 'think in terms of final causation,' and *start* with a

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<sup>259</sup>Wiles, *God's Action*, 62 (italics mine).

<sup>260</sup>Wiles, 'Continuing the Discussion,' *Theology* 85 (January 1982): 10; cf. Wiles, *Faith and Mystery*, 12: The 'God to whom I commit myself as a Christian is a personal God, the living God, a God of love.'

<sup>261</sup>Wiles, 'Continuing,' 11-12.

<sup>262</sup>Wiles, *Faith and Mystery*, 27, 28, 29.

less personal model, something along the lines of the Aristotelian God who moves human beings by the attraction of his own perfection. This could then be, and would certainly need to be, modified in a more personal direction. People, as well as impersonal ideals, can operate by final causation as effective ‘agents’ of the free actions of other human persons.<sup>263</sup>

### A Relational Ontology in a Neo-Deistic Framework: God’s Immanence

This ‘more personal direction’ might seem surprising, in light of Wiles’ naturalistic approach to doing theology, but for him God is either a transcendent, personal creator, or there is little reason for maintaining the concept. In the interest of maintaining this personal aspect he argues for adopting the concept of ‘spirit’ as ‘the primary co-ordinating concept for our reflective understanding of God.’<sup>264</sup> This would replace the traditional ‘Father’ concept. Wiles sees ‘spirit’ language as capturing the essentially personal aspect of humans, and as also reflecting not only individuality in *separation* from others, but its constitution “‘only in my *relatedness* to some other. Spirit is that which lies between, making both separateness and conjunction real.”<sup>265</sup> ‘Spirit’ is that aspect of human beings which allows them to transcend themselves, know themselves ‘as persons.’<sup>266</sup> Just as in much of the Old Testament “‘the Spirit is God in his outreach towards men, interacting with their created spirits and integrating their thoughts and emotions and wills with his own,”<sup>267</sup> so the term “‘spirit” ‘is that which makes a person most fully a person, precisely by taking him out of the confines of his individual self through his or her relationship and communion with others.’<sup>268</sup>

Thus the term ‘spirit’ works better than ‘Father’ in capturing the relational character of the divine-human relation, ‘for it speaks at the same time of a personal,

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<sup>263</sup>Wiles, ‘Continuing,’ 11-12.

<sup>264</sup>Wiles, *Faith and Mystery*, 117.

<sup>265</sup>Wiles, *Faith and Mystery*, 120, 119-120 (italics mine).

<sup>266</sup>Wiles, *Faith and Mystery*, 119-120.

<sup>267</sup>Wiles, *Faith and Mystery*, 120-121.

<sup>268</sup>Wiles, *Faith and Mystery*, 121.

but not limitedly individual, transcendence and of an essential relatedness.<sup>269</sup> Wiles is not advocating a simple shift in emphasis from one person of the Trinity to another (from 'Father' to 'Spirit') as being more religiously meaningful: 'rather it is no longer to allow the concept of "Spirit" to be appropriated as the name for one person of the Trinity, but rather to put it to work as the primary determinant for all our reflective apprehension of God.' This means "'spirit" is not . . . a direct description of the nature of God.' It is a symbol, 'rooted in our experience of spirit in ourselves and made possible by our understanding of spirit as a dimension of human life.'<sup>270</sup> It 'signifies [a holy and transcendent] God's communion with man. . . . Thus to know God as Holy Spirit is to know him as . . . the absolutely other entering into the most intimate conceivable relationship with man.'<sup>271</sup> Thus, 'Holy Spirit' does not describe God, but rather names the human *experience* of God.

Wiles notes that the difference between his model of providence and Kathryn Tanner's more traditional view, may really be rooted in their differing conceptions of 'God and God's relation to the world.'<sup>272</sup> 'Two main models have been characteristic of Christian tradition: the one more personal--God as creator, Father or Lord; the other more pervasive, God as Spirit--a hidden immanent power at work in the world.'<sup>273</sup> He recognises the strengths and weaknesses associated with both. The first (God as Father) lends itself more easily to the notion of agency, 'but . . . it becomes more and more impossible seriously to envisage that sort of agency at work in the world as we know it.' The second model (God as Spirit) lends itself to the idea

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<sup>269</sup>Wiles, *Faith and Mystery*, 120, 24, 117-118. Wiles approves of Geoffrey Lampe's rejection of the Trinity (ibid., 126). Lampe expresses a view of God as spirit which would seem to be compatible with Wiles' view: 'We are speaking of God himself, his personal presence, as active and related.' (G. W. H. Lampe, *God as Spirit*, The Bampton Lectures, 1976 [Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1977], 208).

<sup>270</sup>Wiles, *Faith and Mystery*, 121.

<sup>271</sup>Wiles, 'The Holy Spirit in Christian Theology,' chap. in *Explorations in Theology* 4 (London, UK: SCM Press Ltd., 1979), 68.

<sup>272</sup>Wiles, 'Providence,' 82.

<sup>273</sup>Wiles, 'Providence,' 82-3.

of 'God's universal and effective presence in the world, but the language of agency seems forced and inappropriate' when referring to 'God as Spirit.'<sup>274</sup>

Although these two pictures are very different, and while he opts for the less personal of the images, Wiles thinks it is wise to continue the dialogue between the two views, since out of this interaction there may emerge 'a viable replacement for older understandings of providence.'<sup>275</sup> Working toward such a 'replacement' is part of the purpose of the present thesis.

In spite of the lack of personal agency implied in the symbol 'Spirit,' Wiles nevertheless, applies it to divine action. He shifts the basis of the analogy of personal agency from 'our own experience as personal agents' to that of 'our self-reflexive relation to ourselves and still more our relatedness to other persons. For there can be a rich communion between persons simply by their mutual presence to one another.'<sup>276</sup> Drawing upon Gabriel Marcel, Wiles points out that in human relationships there is a difference between 'a purely physical' type of presence, and that of 'a deeper sense of "presence."' It is this deeper kind of 'all-pervasive' presence which God as 'spirit' allows one to picture.<sup>277</sup> Thus, Wiles is able to place the concepts of 'incarnation' and 'inspiration' on an equal footing with the rest of God's uniform activity, 'for inspiration is not [on this view of God as spirit] "an impersonal influence communicated to a human person externally by a remote deity"; rather it conveys "the deeper meaning of a 'real presence' of God himself.'"<sup>278</sup> Nevertheless, in spite of Wiles' argument, from the human perspective this inspiration seems to be personal only because the human interpreter of the divine significance of his or her experience is a *personal* being. The inspiration here is of the same order that one derives from the work of a skilled painter. God does not convey information directly, in the mode of the Word speaking in human symbols

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<sup>274</sup>Wiles, 'Providence,' 83.

<sup>275</sup>Wiles, 'Providence,' 83.

<sup>276</sup>Wiles, *Faith and Mystery*, 122.

<sup>277</sup>Wiles, *Faith and Mystery*, 122, 12, 124.

<sup>278</sup>Wiles, *Faith and Mystery*, 124.

and language, but rather displays his being and purpose through the character of his work of creation as a whole.

### **A CRITIQUE OF WILES' VIEW OF PROVIDENTIAL ACTION**

One cannot critique Wiles' view of the God-world relation in general, and of providential action in particular, without taking into account his reasons for holding this view--that is, his criteria of scientific worldview, moral concerns, and human freedom. The heart of Wiles' concern is to find a way of *maintaining* a meaningful sense of God's *relation* to the world, while complying with these three criteria. He argues that his kind of project is able to recast the traditional view of divine action into a metaphysical framework that is credible in today's world.<sup>279</sup> This means the rejection of an outmoded 'controller' God, and the introduction of a God who invariably leaves ample room for the discovery and exercise of human freedom and potential.<sup>280</sup>

This section will ask whether a modern scientific worldview does in fact require the exclusion of God's direct interaction with events in the world; whether Wiles' attempt to ameliorate the moral problem of such direct interaction succeeds; and whether his view of the conditions necessary for realising human indeterministic freedom is adequate, given the personal nature of God and humans.

It will also attempt to show that Wiles' theological realism, his desire for at least a minimally relational ontology, and his model of continuous creation provide three openings for a more interactive relation between God and humans, and hence a more orthodox view of God as Trinity, and of God's particular actions in the world.

### **Divine Action and Science**

Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to fully address Wiles' concerns with providence as they arise from a modern scientific worldview, it is worth mentioning that there are many theologians and scientists who do not see the observed regularities of universe as being nearly so closed to divine interaction as

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<sup>279</sup>Cf. Wiles, *Faith and Mystery*, 127.

<sup>280</sup>Wiles, *God's Action*, 60, 51, 54.

Wiles conceives them to be.<sup>281</sup> For example, Wolfhart Pannenberg, in dialogue with science, notes that ‘the idea that God can bring forth what is new and unusual only by breaking the laws of nature has been overruled by the insight that for all their regularity the laws of nature do not have the character of closed (or, better, isolated) systems.’<sup>282</sup> William Stoeger argues convincingly that the ‘laws of nature’ are actually idealised human constructs describing observed regularities of nature, and are therefore theory-laden and corrigible,<sup>283</sup> leaving open the possibility that ‘higher laws’ operating at the level of the personal may in fact only *appear* either to abrogate or fulfil laws operating at the physical level.<sup>284</sup> John Polkinghorne, recognising with Wiles that God’s creative and providential activity reflects God’s faithfulness to the kind of world he has created, nevertheless insists that ‘the steadfast consistency of God in relation to his creation is not to be confused with a dreary uniformity.’<sup>285</sup> From a theological perspective, the same assertion amounts to a claim about general and “special” providence: ‘the God-world relation and the God-man relation are constant; but that is best conceived as the constancy of consistent action in the execution both of an over-all purpose and of particular purposes for individual lives within it.’<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>281</sup>Wiles does grant the logical possibility of miracles where God would act directly as primary cause, but he rejects the probability of God taking advantage of such openness since his failure to do so on every occasion would raise a question about God’s morality (*God’s Action*, 65-66).

<sup>282</sup>Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Edinburgh, UK: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1994), 73.

<sup>283</sup>William Stoeger, S.J., ‘Contemporary Physics and the Ontological Status of the Laws of Nature,’ in *Quantum Cosmology and the Laws of Nature: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., eds. Robert John Russell, Nancey Murphy, and C. J. Isham, A Series on ‘Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action,’ ed. Robert John Russell (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications; Berkeley, CA: The Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 1993, 1996), 205-231.

<sup>284</sup>Stoeger, ‘Describing God’s Action,’ 253.

<sup>285</sup>John Polkinghorne, *Reason and Reality: The Relationship Between Science and Theology* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1991), 56.

<sup>286</sup>Hebblethwaite, ‘Providence and Divine Action,’ 229. Cf. Fraser Watts’ model of ‘God’s influential [interactive] presence in the world’ in terms of ‘a strong view of general providence’ (out of which arises ‘special providence . . . [albeit not entirely]’) as this influence relates to ‘cognitive processes’ (‘Cognitive Neuroscience and Religious Consciousness,’ in *Neuroscience and the Person: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, eds. Robert J. Russell, Nancey Murphy, Theo C. Meyer, and Michael A. Arbib, A Series on ‘Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action,’ ed. Robert John Russell [Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications; Berkeley, CA: The Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 1999], 340-344).



Perhaps the most one can safely conclude from current attempts to find openings in a scientific understanding of the universe for interactive divine action is something like the summary provided by Denis Edwards: ‘*The unpredictability, openness, and flexibility discovered by contemporary science* [at both the micro and macro levels] . . . *provides the basis for a worldview in which divine action and scientific explanation are understood as mutually compatible, but it is not possible to identify the “causal joint” between divine action and created causality.*’ Edwards notes further that ‘a trinitarian theology suggests a dynamic relational presence of God in every quantum event, chaotic system, and human free act, but it suggests a presence and a causality that finally escapes comprehension.’<sup>287</sup> This is more cautious than Polkinghorne’s view, and yet more optimistic than the view of God and the world which fuelled the death of God theology. It amounts to a set of fallible resources for funding a worldview which embraces openness and the possibility for nondeterministic action on both the divine and human levels.<sup>288</sup>

On this view, God first posits and then holds in being, not a static, predetermined pattern and balance of created cause-effect, but a dynamic system of chance and lawfulness, a dynamic interplay of openness, freedom, contingency, and necessity. God interacts with this ‘intrinsic openness of the universe . . . [through a] top-down causality.’ But both Polkinghorne and Peacocke refer to this causality, not in terms of energy, but rather in terms of information. In this way God is not reduced to ‘one cause amongst others,’<sup>289</sup> something Wiles wants to avoid as well.<sup>290</sup>

In a time when science is showing the world to be an open system of interacting energies (instead of a closed, mechanical system of cause and effect), this allows for two developments: first, whichever view of God one adopts (a dynamic

<sup>287</sup>Denis Edwards, ‘Discovery of Chaos and the Retrieval of the Trinity,’ in Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., eds. Robert John Russell, Nancey Murphy, and Arthur Peacocke, A Series on ‘Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action,’ ed. Robert John Russell (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications; Berkeley, CA: The Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 1997), 173. Cf. Polkinghorne, Reason and Reality, 172, 174, 173.

<sup>288</sup>Edwards, ‘Discovery of Chaos,’ 98.

<sup>289</sup>Edwards, ‘Discovery of Chaos,’ 168.

<sup>290</sup>Wiles, God’s Action, 56.

Trinity or a single Subject) this new understanding of the openness in the physical make-up of the world makes it possible to develop models which allow the world to retain its integrity (with no gaps) and yet be open to God's influence,<sup>291</sup> something which even Wiles' model requires. Second, it allows opportunities to model ways in which a relational Trinity shares with the physical and human worlds (in an analogous way) a relational ontology.

Even if the scientific worldview problem could be resolved to Wiles' satisfaction, more important for Wiles is the moral objection to divine interaction and the anthropological problem of human freedom.

### **The Moral Problem of Direct Divine Action and Human Freedom**

The problem of evil forms part of the centrepiece in Wiles' reconstruction of the doctrine of God, and of God's relation to the world. The central problem for traditional theism, as Wiles sees it, is not so much the fact that God intervenes to help some, but that God does not intervene on *all* occasions to counteract evil and its consequences. It is here that he employs his argument for a non-intervening God, even to the extent of ruling out any direct divine communication with humans. Nevertheless, in his model God is still ultimately responsible for creating the kind of world in which, in order to develop free human beings, such things as inequities, evil, and suffering must form part of the fabric of life.<sup>292</sup> Wiles understands that for the theist there are no final answers to the problem of evil,<sup>293</sup> but at this point he finds in God's 'unremitting' love in the person of Christ a basis for faith to believe in

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<sup>291</sup>Tracy, 'Particular Providence,' 304-324. Cf. Robert John Russell's concept of 'a "non-interventionist view of objective special providence"' as made possible by God influencing, without disrupting 'the natural process,' the ontologically indeterministic world of quantum events ('Special Providence and Genetic Mutation: A New Defense of Theistic Evolution,' in Evolutionary and Molecular Biology: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action, eds. Robert John Russell, William R. Stoeger, S.J., and Francisco J. Ayala, A Series on 'Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action,' ed. Robert John Russell (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications; Berkeley, CA: The Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 1998), 200, 203.

<sup>292</sup>Wiles, God's Action, 45, 48, 67, 80.

<sup>293</sup>Cf. William Alston for a similar conclusion ('Divine Action: Shadow or Substance?,' in The God Who Acts: Philosophical and Theological Explorations, ed. Thomas F. Tracy [University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994], 56).

evil's final overthrow.<sup>294</sup> Wiles believes his model of God's strictly uniform action of creation reduces the morally reprehensible possibility of arbitrariness in God's providential relation to the universe.

Although Wiles cannot accept a God who imparts faith and grace to some and not to others, he does recognise that some people naturally come to have a better understanding of, and response to, God's purposes in the world--this fact of life can be attributed to the accidents of "fate," the random vagaries of finite causes and events. The inequities resulting from a traditional view of providence are the result of an arbitrarily acting and communicating God (in Wiles' view). Wiles, therefore, embraces the former source of inequities because he feels this is the price that must be paid in order for human freedom and personality to develop.<sup>295</sup> There are, however, a number of important questions arising from this view.

First, one must ask about the kind of personal maturity Wiles is advocating here. For Wiles, 'freedom' seems to equate to a high degree of autonomy and independence from God<sup>296</sup>--a distinctly Enlightenment ideal.<sup>297</sup> But both the Christian tradition and modern psychology would seem to indicate that, contrary to Wiles, it is precisely in *free intimate interaction* with another that one achieves not only identity, but *freedom* to be truly one's self.<sup>298</sup> Wiles use of 'spirit' moves in this direction, but Wiles is still thinking in terms 'individual,' not 'being as communion.'<sup>299</sup> Furthermore, divine "intervention" in the Christian tradition need not be seen as encouraging an immature childishness, but rather provides the basis

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<sup>294</sup>Wiles, God's Action, 51-52, 53.

<sup>295</sup>Cf. Wiles, God's Action, 37-38, 108.

<sup>296</sup>Cf. Wiles, God's Action, 17.

<sup>297</sup>Cf. Paul Tillich, A History of Christian Thought: From Its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism, ed. Carl E. Braaten (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, Inc., A Touchstone Book, 1967, 1968), 320-24.

<sup>298</sup>Cf. Stephen Happel, 'Divine Providence,' in Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., eds. Robert John Russell, Nancey Murphy, and Arthur Peacocke, A Series on 'Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action,' ed. Robert John Russell (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications; Berkeley, CA: The Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 1997), 201.

<sup>299</sup>Cf. Zizioulas, Being as Communion, 120-122.

for psychological and emotional wholeness from which truly mature levels of love are possible. Jesus, for example, was not advocating an immature, dependent, and childish faith when he said, ‘without me you can do nothing.’<sup>300</sup> Paul Tournier notes that ‘it is . . . by dependence upon God that we have the means of knowing the greatest possible freedom.’<sup>301</sup> Wiles mistakenly identifies radical human autonomy and maturity with radical independence on the personal level.

Second, Wiles’ God is not free to maximise the key aspect of human nature Wiles himself extols—that is, the ability to *relate* to the other in an *interactive* mode at the level of ‘Spirit.’ Wiles’ view of radical human autonomy undermines the relational ontology he seeks to develop. The aspect of ‘spirit’ by which humans transcend themselves, and through which they are mutually constituted in and with the other is, in the end, restricted to an intra-human level. Oddly enough, God, who must be thought able to transcend all human ways of relating, is restricted to relating to humans only on the bare ontological level of giving them existence and then on the psychological and social level as a silent “presence” discerned by the human. One is led to ask whether Wiles has adequately represented a relational ontology. From the Christian perspective Wiles espouses, can one realise his or her full human potential without an interactive relation to God? The Christian tradition has usually said ‘No,’ often expressing the relational constitution of humans in terms of the fittingness of freely worshiping and interacting with God, and describing the goal of human life as “enjoying the divine *relation* of Son to Father, sharing the divine life.” The blessed, although not themselves divine, interact with the Father as closely as does the Son, and so are involved in the work of God as well as the adoration of God.<sup>302</sup>

Wiles’ model of freedom fails to capture the possibility (once creaturely otherness is achieved) of consciously choosing to form community with God. It

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<sup>300</sup>Jn. 15:5 RSV.

<sup>301</sup>Tournier, *To Resist or to Surrender?*, trans. John S. Gilmour (German orig. ed.: *Sich Durchsetzen oder Nachgeben* [Zürich, Switzerland: Rascher Verlag, n.d.]; this ed. trans. from *Tenir tête ou céder* [Geneva, Switzerland: Éditions Labor et Fides, 1962]; Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1964), 39.

<sup>302</sup>Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press Inc.; Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1998), 115, 119.

would seem that one potential benefit of the development of free human beings would be the possibility of exercising that ability at a higher level, the level of becoming a co-worker with God. This is not a violation of one's freedom, but is instead precisely possible *because* of that freedom. Wiles advocates a limited version of this, but the personal aspect of it is all from the human side.<sup>303</sup> In a truly interactive model, however, the potential weight of responsibility and privilege for the free human participant increases exponentially. There is no unfairness in this synergy since it is based (initially) upon what humans come to discern and believe about God and about God's purpose for them. If God *then* "intervenes" by communicating specific information (in the form of guidance), extending further providential grace, and enabling the individual to become an even more positive agent for the common good, this particular providential action could still be conceived as part of God's means of 'making . . . [humans] make themselves,' and would still require that the mechanism of God's agency remain hidden.

Third, by removing God to the "perimeter" of the affairs of the world, Wiles feels he has minimized the problem of God being the immediate and direct cause of evil in the world, but he has also restricted God to very indirect and risky means of achieving his purposes. More importantly, God is removed from that close relationship with humans by means of which any notion of God suffering with them, and of playing a redemptive role, can be made meaningful. Moreover, as noted above, this type of relation leaves humans to the mercy of finite causes.

### **A Personal God and the Trinity**

Wiles holds that religious talk of God's providential "action" is better understood as poetic in nature. Instead, therefore, of speaking in literal terms of God's special causative agency, Wiles prefers to think in terms of 'action' as an awareness of God's overall purposes which functions as a call to align ourselves with them.<sup>304</sup> He interprets all claims to experience of God's special providences as

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<sup>303</sup>Wiles, God's Action, 81, 103, 105, 108.

<sup>304</sup>Wiles, Shared Search, 157-58.

consisting of retroactive interpretations of significant religious experiences.<sup>305</sup>

Where the Bible explicitly affirms God acting in special or miraculous ways in the world, Wiles either rejects these as reflections of an outmoded worldview, or relegates them to the status of legends.<sup>306</sup> Nevertheless, he affirms that the personal God to which such action is ascribed in the Bible is the same God to whom he refers.

The question is whether one can make such innovative revisions to the nature of the acts ascribed to God in the Bible and still be speaking about the same God. And there is the further question regarding the legitimacy of a Biblical view of special providence: assuming (as Wiles does) that in contrast to a modern scientific worldview, the common worldview of the Biblical writers expected divine *interventions*, does this automatically rule out the intelligibility of divine *interaction* in the affairs of the world?

It seems clear that Wiles does intend to speak in *literal* terms of special causative divine agency with respect to the creative act of God as a whole. Two issues come to the fore at this point. First, the creation of world as a whole would mean that the scientific regularities are themselves part of the continuous creative act of God, a fact which Wiles assumes excludes the probability of God “subsequently” interacting with the matrix of created causes. Nevertheless, since the one creative act is an open process, God is free to adjust the shape of the developing story in response to the radically free choices humans make.<sup>307</sup> If God cannot intervene in the particulars, how does he accomplish these revisions, or rather, how does he continuously reintegrate *particular* actions and events into his overall purpose for the world in such a way that that purpose will be achieved? Wiles insists, for example, that

God’s purpose is fixed and unchanging only in the most general sense. God is affected by our actions in such a way that the particular form of that purpose is changed to take account of them. So if we affirm our confidence in God’s ultimate triumph [and Wiles does], we are not affirming that

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<sup>305</sup>Wiles, *God’s Action*, 81, 83, 89; cf. idem, *Remaking*, 38.

<sup>306</sup>Wiles, ‘Divine Action,’ 17, 27.

<sup>307</sup>Wiles, *God’s Action*, 104-105, 107-108.



some fixed target will be reached, . . . . It is a genuinely unknown future of which we are speaking.’<sup>308</sup>

It would seem that God’s integration of the consequences of free human actions into his purpose, such that the form of the purpose continues to change, leaves the door open to divine interaction. It looks as if the parameters of Wiles’ model of the God-world relation requires some mechanism by which God takes into account what happens in the world, but without leaving it fully to its own devices. Although Wiles’ doctrine of *continuing* creation opens the door to a more interactive view of the God-world relation, he rejects such a possibility as morally unacceptable.

Wiles affirms that the ‘unremitting character’ of God’s love, as ‘seen in the figure of Christ,’ provides the confidence that all evil will eventually be overcome. God remains engaged with the world as long as it takes in order to complete both creation and salvation for all.<sup>309</sup> It would seem that some version of middle knowledge is required by Wiles’ model of continuous creation, but he rejects this option.<sup>310</sup> It remains unclear, therefore, how God’s love will ultimately achieve the set of conditions in which ‘what *is* is God’s will.’ Perhaps this is the reason Wiles asserts that ‘we must continue to walk by [a] faith’ which is, nevertheless, ‘not a wholly blind and unreasonable faith.’<sup>311</sup> Thus, the most he will say about the possibility of ‘personal life beyond our present order of existence’ is that it is ‘not philosophically absurd.’<sup>312</sup>

The second point arising from Wiles’ acceptance of special divine agency in the creation of the whole has to do with the fact that this act is of such a unique character ‘there is no analogy within the world for any activity involving such absolute creativity as is being affirmed here. Any attempt to speak of the “how” of God’s creative action can only be by way of a highly tentative form of imaginative

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<sup>308</sup>Wiles, God’s Action, 51.

<sup>309</sup>Cf. Wiles, God’s Action, 48, 51, 52.

<sup>310</sup>Wiles, God’s Action, 107, 72-73.

<sup>311</sup>Wiles, God’s Action, 52.

<sup>312</sup>Wiles, God’s Action, 51-52.

construction.<sup>313</sup> But Wiles himself rejects the doctrine of the incarnation on these same grounds, namely, that its claim to uniqueness makes it impossible to substantiate, because it is a one-of-a-kind event, and no standard is available by which to assess its probability.

Moreover, the fact that Wiles is not restricting himself to the God of classical Deism forces him to move beyond the idea of God as a pragmatic concept,<sup>314</sup> or as an impersonal final cause, and to posit a personal God who loves his creation and suffers with it, and whose final purpose for his creation will ultimately triumph.<sup>315</sup> At this point it would seem Wiles has moved beyond the limits of what his own experiential foundationalism can allow him to say about God. He either needs to retract some of his more positive claims about God's nature and purpose (as Kaufman does in his more recent works), or construct a set of criteria that allows him to say more than what he does. To make the positive claims about God that he does, he would need at least to allow for a more direct kind of divine communication.<sup>316</sup>

Wiles is left with a unitary God, not quite the God of classical Deism, nor yet the God of the Bible who is able to relate to the creation in a multiplicity of ways. The relational nature of God and humans that Wiles wishes to emphasise would seem to make the doctrine of the Trinity a natural way of picturing that relationality. In maintaining a link to the Christ event in doctrinal construction, and in speaking of the revealing work of the Spirit in a doctrine of revelation, Wiles can even sound "trinitarian." For example, he adopts the Johannine figure of Jesus as embodying 'the truth in himself as a person, [noting] that his full significance was not grasped by his disciples during his lifetime, but that it will be disclosed by the Spirit in the life of the church.'<sup>317</sup> But Jesus is not, in this view, the incarnation of a divine Son or

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<sup>313</sup>Wiles, 'Divine Action,' 25.

<sup>314</sup>Cf. Gordon D. Kaufman, In Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 4, 8, 268-271, 273, 279, 290, 291, 293, 416.

<sup>315</sup>Wiles, God's Action, 51.

<sup>316</sup>Cf. Vernon White for a similar set of problems arising out of Wiles' model (The Fall of a Sparrow: A Concept of Special Divine Action, [Devon, UK: The Paternoster Press, 1985], 64-71).

<sup>317</sup>Wiles, Remaking, 10.

Logos, and the 'Spirit' is simply a name given to one's experience of God's all-pervasive presence.

Wiles rejects the doctrine of the Trinity for the following reasons: the ambiguity of the evidence in the NT and in the early church; the incoherence of a non-interventionist view of divine action when it is combined with a doctrine of a special incarnation of the divine Son; and because, in his view, the only way one can claim to have knowledge of 'the inner life of God' is if one first believes in a specially inspired 'revelation given in clear propositional form.'<sup>318</sup> It seems clear that the hermeneutical presuppositions of Wiles' neo-deistic model of the God-world relation pre-determine how he will interpret all human experience of the divine, including any claims of special revelation.

Just because, however, some factions in the early church held to a binitarian view of God, need not require Wiles to reject the doctrine of the Trinity as having inadequate foundations in the tradition. For example, as noted above, he is willing to go beyond Kaufman and say that the usefulness of the "God" concept allows one to say God probably exists.<sup>319</sup> In spite of Wiles' agnosticism about what one can know about God, he further intuitively feels that God is loving, created the world *ex nihilo*, suffers with humans, has an ultimate purpose which will eventually triumph, and is the ultimate Sovereign. Given Wiles' methodology, if he is able to discern all of these features of the God-world relation, the option is at least open to him to construct, for example, a functional Trinity which can give expression to Christian experience of God in terms of three levels of relationship. Ruth Page suggests such a model as follows: 'a fixed relationship' which grants the security of 'unconditional love'; a 'flexible relationship' in which God continues to provide 'care and concern . . . for those creatures to whom freedom has been given to discover the possibilities and the constraints of finite existence'; and a relationship as 'friend' and 'companion': friendship, referring to a 'one-to-one relationship' marked by 'a mutual desire for the other's well-being and interests,' and companionship referring to God's solidarity

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<sup>318</sup>Wiles, 'Some Reflections on the Origins of the Doctrine of the Trinity,' chap. in Working Papers in Doctrine (London, UK: SCM Press Ltd., 1976), 17, 14, 16.

<sup>319</sup>Maurice F. Wiles, 'Can Theology Still Be About God?', 231.

with creation in all of its circumstances.<sup>320</sup> A doctrine of the Trinity could thus be based on two supports: the shape of Christian experience of God on the one hand, and its ability to picture God's presence with humans in the traditional terms of fellowship with the Father, through the Son and in the Spirit. Whichever model of the Trinity is used, it has the advantage of giving at least analogical expression to the church's experience of God as personal and relational, and does so through imagery that more adequately corresponds to traditional Christian experience.

In Wiles model, the "personal" aspect of God is seen only indirectly, as reflected first in God's intentional 'act' of deciding to create the world,<sup>321</sup> and second in God designing its character in such a way that it brings forth human *persons*. The personal aspect of God (in relation to humans) is known only indirectly from the perspective of the human side of the relationship--since this is the only perspective available to them. It is the *personal* nature of the *human* experience of the 'ultimate' that suggests a God who is not less than personal,<sup>322</sup> not the actions of God as a personal agent. Brian Hebblethwaite rightly suggests that if one is going to retain a 'personal theism,' such 'a one-sided personal relation' fails to give adequate account of God's action in humans.<sup>323</sup> Moreover, in spite of Wiles' intention to the contrary, it threatens to collapse the distinction between God and the world. It becomes difficult to conceptualise how the world as God's creative act maintains its own integrity over against God. Ian Barbour suggests it not only departs 'significantly from the biblical witness,' it also jeopardizes 'both divine and human freedom.'<sup>324</sup>

Colin Gunton, for example, arguing in support of a trinitarian view of creation and providence, suggests that if the divine creative love is qualified pneumatologically, 'the third person of the Trinity' can be seen as 'the one whose

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<sup>320</sup>Ruth Page, 'God With Us: Warming to the Trinity,' *Theology in Scotland*, 4, no. 2 (Autumn 1997): 34-40. Cf. also her *God With Us: Synergy in the Church* (London, UK: SCM Press, 2000), 29, 10-29.

<sup>321</sup>Wiles, *God's Action*, 96, 107.

<sup>322</sup>Cf. Wiles, *Faith and Mystery*, 12-13.

<sup>323</sup>Hebblethwaite, 'Providence and Divine Action,' 229.

<sup>324</sup>Ian Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science*, the Gifford Lectures, 1989-1991, vol. 1 (San Francisco, CA: 1990), 258, 269.

function is to make the love of God a love that is opened towards that which is not itself, to perfect it in otherness. . . . God is not . . . a closed circle, but a self-sufficient community of love freely opened outwards to embrace the other.’<sup>325</sup> It is the special role of the personal Spirit to enable creation to realise its redemptive potential made possible by Christ.<sup>326</sup>

In this model the Spirit is both the self-effacing, *creative energy* of God which enables humanity to maintain its *distinction* (rather than Wiles’ ‘radical freedom’<sup>327</sup>), as well as God in personal relation with humans enabling *their* personal character, as well as being the means through which they enjoy communion with God as mediated through Christ.<sup>328</sup>

Although Gunton and Wiles are working with very different definitions of the Spirit, there are overlapping conceptualities in their accounts of the Spirit’s function which point toward a more positive and personal agential role for the Spirit in God’s providential action in the world. This role helps to instantiate both the ontological dependence of humans on the Creator, and maintains ontological and personal distinction between humans and the Creator.

### **INITIAL ASSESSMENT WILES’ MODEL**

As indicated above, when Wiles begins to identify the human experience of the sense of wonder that anything exists at all, the sense of purpose underlying the surface events of the world, the feeling of absolute dependence, the experience of ultimate concern, and the sense of a ‘creative mystery’ in the processes of the world, with something more than a reasonable hypothesis that “God” might exist, that is, with a positive and specific entity (the personal, sovereign, creator God of Christian theism), he has staked a claim which requires a more direct mode of knowledge than

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<sup>325</sup>Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, Edinburgh Studies in Constructive Theology (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 128.

<sup>326</sup>Cf. Gunton, ‘God the Holy Spirit: Augustine and his Successors,’ chap. in *Theology Through the Theologians: Selected Essays 1972-1995* (Edinburgh, UK: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1996), 118; and Gunton, *Triune Creator*, 188.

<sup>327</sup>Wiles, *God’s Action*, 93.

<sup>328</sup>Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Edinburgh, UK: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1991, 1997), 199.

he allows. It is not enough to say that because the Biblical writers were speaking in terms of their own worldview about a common human experience of a religious reality one can re-frame that experience to fit his or her own worldview, and still be speaking about the same God. Wiles says that in terms of a modern scientific worldview, the Biblical writers' *understanding* of their religious experience was wrong--not the *fact* of the religious experience, but the concepts and content by which it was expressed. Wiles declares that such a view of God is no longer credible. He is reduced to stating that, after all, Christians are speaking about *their* religious experience, which must take its shape from the worldview they happen to hold at the time. So Wiles needs to either step back from his more positive claims about this God, or step forward and find a way to allow this God to communicate more directly with humans.

Wiles' theological realism, his desire for at least a minimally relational ontology, and his model of a continuous creation which continues to incorporate the results of particular free human acts, has opened the door to a more interactive model of the God-world relation. These are some of the areas where theologians such as Gilkey, Pannenberg, and Moltmann can provide suggestions for a way of interweaving some of these threads into a new paradigm that allows the transcendent, sovereign God of Wiles to be truly *with* his creation.

### LANGDON GILKEY: GOD IN HISTORY

The traditional claim that God governs the world according to an eternal and comprehensive blueprint is the very assertion many contemporary theologians have questioned. Lutheran theologian Philip Hefner, therefore, suggests that 'the great challenge to faith and theology today is to comprehend how this world's history can be said to be unfolding within God's will and guidance.'<sup>329</sup> Benjamin Farley concurs, stating that 'central to the Bible is the view that God is active in history overcoming evil and creating new possibilities. It is precisely how this [providential

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<sup>329</sup>Philip Hefner, 'Fourth Locus: The Creation,' in *Christian Dogmatics*, eds. Carl E. Braaten, and Robert W. Jenson [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1984]), 341.



activity] should be interpreted that has become problematic for theology.<sup>330</sup> This is the central issue addressed by Langdon Gilkey.

Gilkey, like Albert Outler,<sup>331</sup> develops his doctrine of providence as a direct attempt to respond to the contemporary crisis with providence as reflected in the death of God movement.<sup>332</sup> Gilkey's work on providence (as part of a theology of history) is carried out with a central apologetical aim in mind: to construct a Christian doctrine of providence which respects the *intent* of traditional formulations of this doctrine, but which also reinterprets those essential concerns in a way compatible with a modern scientific (and naturalistic) understanding of the world, and especially in terms of the modern experience of life as historical passage.<sup>333</sup> A part of that apologetical agenda involves the argument that secular experience itself reveals a hidden religious concern for the ultimate, and thus requires a religious or Christian element in any model that would adequately express this reality.<sup>334</sup>

In the interest of making a doctrine of providence relevant (intelligible) to 'modern consciousness' (which understands 'reality' to be 'in passage, deeply and inescapably temporal'), Gilkey argues that one must work 'in terms of temporality or process.'<sup>335</sup> With this general criterion in mind, he adopts Tillich's correlation

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<sup>330</sup>Benjamin Farley, The Providence of God (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 220.

<sup>331</sup>Albert Outler, Who Trusts in God: Musings on the Meaning of Providence (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1968).

<sup>332</sup>Cf. Langdon Gilkey, Naming the Whirlwind: The Renewal of God-Language (Indianapolis, IN; New York, NY: The Bobbs-Merrill Company Inc., 1969), 148; and Gilkey, 'A Retrospective Glance at My Work,' in The Theology of Langdon B. Gilkey: Systematic and Critical Studies, eds. Kyle A. Pasewark, and Jeff B. Pool (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999), 513. Niels H. Gregersen claims that Gilkey's theology of providence (Reaping the Whirlwind) is 'still the best monograph on the subject' ('Providence in an Indeterministic World,' CTNS Bulletin 14, no. 1 [Winter 1994]: 16).

<sup>333</sup>Langdon Gilkey, Reaping the Whirlwind: A Christian Interpretation of History (New York, NY: The Seabury Press, 1976), 199. More recently, Peter Hodgson has also addressed the issue of who God is and how God relates to history using a Hegelian and Process framework (God in History: Shapes of Freedom (Nashville, TN: Parthenon Press, 1989). Cf. also his Winds of the Spirit: A Constructive Christian Theology (London, UK: SCM Press, 1994).

<sup>334</sup>Gilkey, Reaping, 294; cf. *ibid.*, 129, 152-153.

<sup>335</sup>Langdon Gilkey, 'God,' in Christian Theology: An Introduction to its Traditions and Tasks, eds. Peter Hodgson, and Robert King (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1982; London, U.K.: SPCK, 1983), 82; cf. Gilkey, Reaping, 144.

method of doing theology.<sup>336</sup> In order to facilitate this strategy, he takes a bottom-up, or natural theology approach in developing his doctrines of God and providence.

The fact that Gilkey basis his doctrinal constructions on human *experiences* of God means that God is defined only in relation to creation, and specifically in relation to human understandings of creation. One must, therefore, understand his reinterpretation of God and providence within the context of his phenomenological analysis of the ontological structures of nature and of history. For this reason, a brief summary of Gilkey's theological method seems in order.

There are four essential steps in Gilkey's method: first, a phenomenological and existential analysis of modern secular experience; second, 'an ontological explication and argument'; third, a search for the eidetic or core meaning of traditional Christian symbols; finally, a correlation of the key aspects of human experience of the world with the central ideational meaning of Christian symbols.<sup>337</sup> This correlation results, in Gilkey's view, in a more adequately thematised and so more fully understood 'secular experience of sacrality,' thus enabling a more adequate response to the conditions of ambiguity in historical experience.<sup>338</sup>

In the first and second steps of this method, Gilkey works on the assumption that in order for any claims to knowledge of God (however indirect) to be credible, they must reflect or correspond to the dominant metaphysical or ontological assumptions of a given community or society.<sup>339</sup> Gilkey has taken seriously what he

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<sup>336</sup>Cf. Mark Kline Taylor's summary of Tillich's method (*Paul Tillich: Theologian of the Boundaries*, in the series, *The Making of Modern Theology: 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Texts*, ed. John de Gruchy [London, UK: Collins Liturgical Publications, 1987], 126-127). Gilkey suggests that in the 'formal equation between secular questions and Christian answers,' 'meaning results from an interaction of experience and symbol' (*Naming*, 456; cf. 452-457). Gilkey notes that although he and David Tracy developed their theological methods independently of each other, his method of doing theology corresponds closely with that of Tracy, as represented in Tracy's *Blessed Rage for Order* (Gilkey, *Reaping*, 368-369, n.1; 371, n. 17).

<sup>337</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 371, n. 17.

<sup>338</sup>Gilkey, 'The Universal and Immediate Presence of God,' in *The Future of Hope: Theology as Eschatology*, ed. Frederick Herzog (New York, NY: Herder and Herder Inc., 1970), 100.

<sup>339</sup>He recognises of course, that if there is no such consensus, then the attempt to convince people of either the existence of God, or of God's providence, 'never gets started' (Gilkey, 'The God of Nature,' in *Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., eds. Russell, Robert John, Nancey Murphy, and Arthur Peacocke, A Series on 'Scientific Perspectives on Divine

understands to be two of the prevalent features of modern Western culture: a privileging of the scientific (and naturalistic) understanding of nature, and modern historical consciousness. That is why he spends so much effort developing, on the basis of modern scientific understandings of nature, a ‘universal’ set of ‘principles of all experience’ which can serve ‘as suggestions for a possible metaphysics or ontology’ for ‘all of finite actuality.’<sup>340</sup> While he carries out this attempt specifically in reference to ‘nature’ in his article, ‘The God of Nature’ (with a focus on the *existence* of God), he earlier undertook a similar task with respect to the modern experience of historical consciousness in, *Reaping the Whirlwind* (with a focus on discerning God’s *providential presence*). It may be helpful to summarise the conclusion of these analyses.

In ‘The God of Nature’ he delineates the ontological structure of ‘all of finite actuality’ as follows:

(1) *Temporality* or passage . . . . (2) The definiteness or *determinedness of actuality as the given* . . . . (3) The role of *possibility*, of genuine possibilities that have not been actual before, of novelty . . . . (4) The role of *order as self-maintaining* . . . .

(5) There is apparently *self-determination* in that [‘achieved’] actuality [and ‘possibility’], a self-constitution at each level of being from the spontaneity evident in inorganic existence, through self-direction in organic and social life, to the self-choosing and autonomy of human existence.<sup>341</sup>

Reflecting this phenomenological analysis of the ontology of reality, ‘God’ then becomes the name for the “‘continuing and necessary Power”” grounding and sustaining ongoing temporality and contingency; for ‘the continuing ground of our freedom’ or ‘self-constitution’; and for the ground of possibilities experienced within an overarching order.<sup>342</sup>

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Action,’ ed. Robert John Russell [Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications; Berkeley, CA: The Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 1997], 216).

<sup>340</sup>Gilkey, ‘God of Nature,’ 216.

<sup>341</sup>Gilkey, ‘God of Nature,’ 216-217 (italics mine).

<sup>342</sup>Gilkey, ‘God of Nature,’ 218-219.

In Reaping the Whirlwind, Gilkey begins with a phenomenological and existential analysis of the human experience of history as process.<sup>343</sup> Through this analysis he discerns that key areas of human life (historical, political and social) are characterised by an ultimate concern.<sup>344</sup> This existential ultimate concern arises at the boundary where the finite meets the infinite. Here one is confronted not only with concerns requiring answers beyond his or her finite ability to give, but also with the intuition that a transcendent “something” or “someone” grounds the whole of existence in all its aspects. While Gilkey thinks that this transcendent ground of being, freedom, possibility and process is sensed within the experience of all peoples, and while he considers each major religion to represent a valid response to it, he turns to his own particular religious milieu (the Christian symbol set) in order to interpret this ultimate. Following Whitehead, Gilkey posits ‘a factor “God”’ in order to explain what it is that ties actuality and possibility together in a coherent manner.<sup>345</sup> Moreover, Gilkey justifies his use of the Christian symbol set (especially those doctrines he thinks relevant to the findings of his phenomenological analysis of history<sup>346</sup>) by arguing that it enables a more coherent and experientially adequate<sup>347</sup> account of one’s experience of history as containing, on the one hand, ‘destiny and

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<sup>343</sup>Although there is an obvious overlap in the results of these two ontological analyses (i. e., of nature and of history), the different point of entry in each brings to light a slightly different set of categories. For example, the analysis of history allows Gilkey to use more obviously theological terminology for his findings, such as ‘grace,’ ‘sin,’ ‘providence,’ and ‘eschatology.’

<sup>344</sup>Gilkey, Reaping, 37, 339, n. 21., 127; cf. *ibid.*, 129.

<sup>345</sup>Gilkey, Reaping, 125. Gilkey, however, does not follow those “process” views of God which deny that God is the source or ground of finite reality and give to “creativity” that status of ultimacy traditionally accorded to God’ (‘God,’ 82).

<sup>346</sup>These include ‘sin and grace,’ ‘estrangement, self-destruction and reconciliation,’ ‘creation and . . . providence,’ ‘Christology, grace and eschatology’ (Gilkey, Reaping, 127).

<sup>347</sup>Gilkey identifies two criteria for intelligibility or credibility for doing theology in a modern context: ‘coherence among its fundamental concepts and adequacy to the facts of experience’ (Reaping, 128). Gilkey’s concept of what counts as ‘*facts of experience*’ (italics mine) assumes that all such “facts” are heavily theory-laden (Naming, 432). Philosopher Philip Kitcher, however, cautions against overstating the case for theory-ladenness, since, if no adjustment of theories could be derived from the impingement of ‘inputs from nature,’ it would no longer be possible to arrive at ‘intersubjective agreement’ between those with differing ‘background cognitive states’ (The Advancement of Science: Science Without Legend, Objectivity Without Illusions [Oxford, UK; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993; paperback ed., 1995], 167, 67)).

freedom,' 'grace' and 'reconciliation,' and on the other hand, 'fate, sin,' 'estrangement, [and] self-destruction.'<sup>348</sup>

The third and fourth steps of Gilkey's method involves a search for the 'ideational (eidetic)' meaning<sup>349</sup> of key Christian symbols (doctrines), in this way reducing their range of meaning to a generic idea or essential concern which can then be affirmed on the basis of a natural theology (and thus correlated to his ontology of nature and history). This method enables him to correlate the phenomenological and existential findings of his earlier analysis (which points to a transcendent ground of 'ultimate' meaning<sup>350</sup>) with the central meanings of the key symbols of the Christian tradition (which names the 'dimension of ultimacy' God<sup>351</sup>). For example, the concept of the divine Logos, often interpreted in Christian tradition as the Son (the second Person of the Trinity), now becomes the impersonal 'graded and ordered envisionment of God of the infinite realm of possibility.'<sup>352</sup> In this way he can restate these symbols as expressions of the modern experience of the world as understood in process terms: 'becoming' takes priority over 'being,' and the future (with its open potential and possibilities) can really improve on the present. Thus, 'these [symbols] are not doctrines about a being called God, but doctrines about the creaturely as the sacred manifests itself in and through the creaturely. . . . [W]hat we understand through these unique symbols and so in this unique way is the appearance of the sacred in and through the finite, and not the sacred itself.'<sup>353</sup> Since 'God is in some important sense "hidden" within temporal passage,' this requires the use of an '*analogical* rather than univocal mode of speech,' and also means 'that the divine

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<sup>348</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 127; cf. 129, 146, 294.

<sup>349</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 182, 140.

<sup>350</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 130-133.

<sup>351</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 247.

<sup>352</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 306.

<sup>353</sup>Gilkey, *Naming*, 466- 467; cf. Gilkey, *Reaping*, 302, 430, n. 6. Gilkey claims precedent for this method of using indirect language about God in both Schleiermacher and Calvin, although he differs from Schleiermacher in that he does not think 'symbols . . . [can] be drawn out of feelings,' but 'rather, we see feelings, experience, or meaning as an interaction of symbols and life' (*Naming*, 467, n. 25).

presence is to be recognized and acknowledged more through a religious discernment than by means of objective inquiry.<sup>354</sup>

With these methodological parameters in mind, the following section will outline Gilkey's view of the God-world relation.

### ***THE GOD-WORLD RELATION: 'CREATIVE PROVIDENCE'***

In keeping with his natural theology approach, Gilkey seeks to arrive at a doctrine of God consistent with his analysis and interpretation of 'the abstractions of the scientific understanding of nature.'<sup>355</sup> In this way he can claim scientific sponsorship for the idea of God and, therefore, a wider credibility in a society that privileges scientific knowledge.

#### **God Defined in Relation to Creation**

Gilkey's reasoning proceeds as follows: 'the scientific understanding of nature' reveals certain principles or structures of nature,<sup>356</sup> each of which can be interpreted as 'a trace of God': 'power,' 'order,' 'a redemptive principle,' contingency and temporality, 'spontaneity' and 'freedom,' and 'order.'<sup>357</sup> 'God is the eternal source of order amid novelty, uniting the determined past with the possibilities latent in the open future--and thus God is as essential for the unity and development of nature as for its being.'<sup>358</sup>

Gilkey admits his theological method and presuppositions result in 'a view of God' which is 'hardly traditional,' grounded as it is in human experience of God's

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<sup>354</sup>Gilkey, 'God,' 84. It would seem that Tillich is the common factor behind both Gilkey's 'religious discernment' and Wiles' 'ecstatic reason' (Wiles, 'Divine Action,' 26, 27). Gilkey argues further that, since 'we *are* nature,' nature can be 'known from the inside . . . both in terms of self-awareness and in terms of the awareness of the other as person' ('God of Nature,' 217).

<sup>355</sup>Gilkey, 'God of Nature,' 217.

<sup>356</sup>Gilkey often uses the term 'nature' inclusively to refer to 'all that is,' thus including humans ('God of Nature,' 217).

<sup>357</sup>Gilkey, 'God of Nature,' 217, 218-219.

<sup>358</sup>Gilkey, 'God of Nature,' 219-220.



'activity in and on us and on our world.'<sup>359</sup> Thus, in one's symbolic language about God

our direct referent is *not* the divine as it is in itself . . . .  
 Rather is our language multivalent, language *about* the finite with regard to what appears in and to our experience, the ultimate or sacral dimension there, but understood in terms of these symbols. Thus the symbol of God as creator refers not to some pictured absolute, but only to the ultimate and sacral ground of our contingency.<sup>360</sup>

Expressing this definition more fully, Gilkey defines the symbol 'God' as 'the unconditioned ground' of the ever-changing sequence of 'the not-yet future [becoming] real in the freedom of the present,' and then 'vanish[ing] into the nonbeing of the past.' This 'unconditioned ground' or 'deeper reality, experienced in the *continuities* present in changing time, in the *freedom* also present in time, and in the *novel possibilities* impinging on time, is the initial referent for the word "God."<sup>361</sup>

One immediate significance of this indirect approach to knowledge of God is that Gilkey's doctrines of God, creation, providence and eschatology are intrinsically intertwined, since they are abstractions from common human experience, as well as interpretations of that experience.

As the source of all that is, God is 'unconditioned, infinite, and absolute.'<sup>362</sup> Gilkey thus adopts the traditional doctrine of '*creatio ex nihilo*,' but not in the sense that everything is willed and actualised by God in eternity.<sup>363</sup> For Gilkey, the myth of creation does not refer to a beginning, but rather to the ongoing dependence of creation on its Creator.<sup>364</sup> He affirms the traditional symbol of creation *ex nihilo* for

<sup>359</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 310.

<sup>360</sup>Gilkey, *Naming*, 466.

<sup>361</sup>Gilkey, 'God,' 83; cf. Gilkey, *Reaping*, 244, 248, 249, 250, 303; and Gilkey, 'God of Nature,' 219.

<sup>362</sup>Gilkey, 'God,' 84; cf. *Reaping*, 307.

<sup>363</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 307; cf. *ibid.*, 247-248; cf. also Gilkey, 'God,' 82. Gilkey, *Reaping*, 248-249 (italics mine).

two reasons: first, 'to separate God from the origination of the totality of the being which is ours . . . is . . . to reduce God to *one* metaphysical factor balanced by others,' and 'secondly, it is to relinquish the essential sacrality of existence, of life, of being--the *dynamic vitality* which is fully as sacred as is form itself.'<sup>365</sup>

In the interest of maintaining a further link with tradition, Gilkey finds a 'trinitarian framework' for understanding God: 'being, truth and love,' or 'being, logos, and love.'<sup>366</sup> But this is not the traditional Trinity. It does not refer to three "persons," but rather identifies three ways in which Christians experience the personal God as the ultimate. This functional 'trinitarian framework' corresponds to the basic ontology of the experience of life as history.<sup>367</sup> Thus, it defines God as the ground of being, of freedom and possibility, and of love, grace or redemption.<sup>368</sup>

This trinitarian doctrine of 'creative providence'<sup>369</sup> does not define God's being *in se*, but only complementary aspects of his relation to creaturely existence. For example, Gilkey understands the historical Jesus to have been a mortal man who was peculiarly able to exemplify authentic human being through his open relationship to God. The very fact that this (now dead) person still mediates to Christians experiences of God's unconditional acceptance and love, and thus facilitates experiences of 'authentic life,' is itself evidence that some infinite ground of 'power that transcends his passing and continues as the ground of our fleeting

<sup>364</sup>Gilkey, Maker of Heaven and Earth: The Christian Doctrine of Creation in Light of Modern Knowledge (New York, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1959; Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1965), 312-318.

<sup>365</sup>Gilkey, Reaping, 248-249 (*italics mine*).

<sup>366</sup>Gilkey, Reaping, 310, 297; cf. *ibid.*, 310-318.

<sup>367</sup>Although Gilkey does not develop his limiting criterion, this ontological connection is, presumably, the only reason for restricting the number of ways for expressing how God relates to us. Otherwise, since there are no authoritative special divine revelations of the nature of God's being, he would have insufficient criteria for such a specific number. John Cobb, for example, questions the traditional number of three with respect to the Trinity. He wonders if there are not equally good reasons, arising from within the biblical and early church traditions themselves for holding to a 'binity' or even a 'quaternity' (John Cobb, Jr., 'The Relativization of the Trinity,' in Trinity in Process: A Relational Theology of God, eds. Joseph A. Bracken, and Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki [New York, N.Y.: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1997], 2-3).

<sup>368</sup>Gilkey, Reaping, 297; cf. *ibid.*, 312.

<sup>369</sup>Gilkey, Reaping, 249.

present, must come to us through this lordly figure of the past.<sup>370</sup> Thus, Jesus is not the *divine* logos, but rather exemplifies one who made the most of God's envisionment of possibilities (logos) for his life.

Gilkey's Trinity does not denote a type of modalism, since God functions in these roles simultaneously. A doctrine of God as a functional "trinity" is thus required by Gilkey's model because God is related to the world as giver of existence (being), as the source of freedom and the provider of possibilities (logos), and as reconciling grace (love)--a 'threefold divine activity.'<sup>371</sup>

### **Divine Sovereignty and 'Creative Providence'**

Gilkey wants to reinterpret, and yet retain, the following crucial elements in the classical formulations of providence: first, 'the sovereignty of God over history . . . [as] controlled, directed and defined by God's eschatological goal'; second, the link between God's providential activity and 'external or "objective" events, both natural and historical'; third, 'the purpose of providence, and so the ultimate goal of history, . . . [as] the establishment and so the freeing of freedom--the transformation for all men and women of fate into destiny'; fourth, Gilkey rather selectively interprets traditional doctrines of providence as showing that 'God does not work in history as an external cause but in and through the creaturely forces and dynamic factors of history'--Gilkey does not follow the tradition's assertion that God *also* acts *directly* in the external events of history, that is, by-passing secondary means; finally, Gilkey affirms that 'providence works through not against human freedom'<sup>372</sup>--he especially wants to avoid theological determinism. In the interests of his apologetic purpose, he develops a theology of providence from within the hermeneutic of a naturalistic, modern historical consciousness.

#### **Divine Sovereignty Reinterpreted**

The fact that God is the sovereign source of all that is raises the question of 'how to unite intelligibly the *absoluteness* of God as the unconditioned source of our

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<sup>370</sup>Gilkey, *Naming*, 409.

<sup>371</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 318.

total being with the dynamic *relatedness* and the *reciprocal activity* of God as the ground, guide, dialogical partner, and redeemer of our freedom.<sup>373</sup> Gilkey resolves this theodicy problem by revising the classical doctrine of the sovereignty of God such that God is now *self-limited*, participates in temporality, and is 'subject to change.'<sup>374</sup> In this way Gilkey aims to strike a necessary balance between God's transcendence and immanence: God cannot be only immanent in history, for this would make 'history's estrangement' an aspect of God's being; neither can God be fully transcendent to creation, for then God would be unable to communicate new possibilities through which alone the distortions of history's structures can be redeemed.<sup>375</sup> As the ultimate *ground* of both being and meaning, of destiny, freedom and possibility, God does not unilaterally enact or even orchestrate the events of history (as in the biblical view<sup>376</sup>), but works only in and through secondary causes in a naturalistic fashion.<sup>377</sup>

This results in an analogical view of divine action in which God is fully immanent within (but not subject to) the 'dynamic process' of historical being.<sup>378</sup> God's action is uniform,<sup>379</sup> albeit ordered in accordance with each level of complexity. God cannot, however, be thought of as a competing cause on the creaturely level. God's 'providential creativity' is what funds the whole process of 'continuing existence'<sup>380</sup> from within, and thus necessarily in a hidden way, as the

<sup>372</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 240.

<sup>373</sup>Gilkey, 'God,' 82; cf. Gilkey, *Reaping*, 414, n. 31. Since Gilkey rejects the biblical practice of speaking univocally about God acting, working, doing, or speaking, he clearly means to speak *analogically* of God as 'dialogical partner,' and of God's 'reciprocal activity' (Cf. Gilkey, 'Cosmology, Ontology, and the Travail of Biblical Language,' in *God's Activity in the World: The Contemporary Problem*, ed. Owen C. Thomas, in American Academy of Religion series, Studies in Religion, ed. Charley Hardwick, no. 31 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 32).

<sup>374</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 309, 306-310; cf. *ibid.*, 248; and Gilkey, 'God,' 84.

<sup>375</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 152.

<sup>376</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 136.

<sup>377</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 247.

<sup>378</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 249. 'In the sense of ground, limit and resource of our being and its powers--and in that alone--God is ultimate' (*ibid.*, 248).

<sup>379</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 298.

ground of being, process and possibilities. There are no divine interventions, no double agency,<sup>381</sup> 'no divine wonders . . . and no divine voices.'<sup>382</sup>

The picture drawn here, however, of God interacting with creation through the constant offer of best possibilities for creaturely action, even though hidden in the very depths of the constitution of each creature, would seem to entail some form of efficient causality. John Cobb, writing from a Process perspective, argues that 'God must be some kind of a cause of events or else there is no point in speaking of him at all.' Cobb's solution is to speak of God as efficient cause in terms of 'real' or 'actual' influence.<sup>383</sup>

If one is going to retain the notion of creation *ex nihilo*, and of some form of creative providential interaction with creation, it may not either be necessary, or even possible, to exclude the idea of God working in specific instances in order to bring about an effect in creation (particular providence) in much the same way as a human might act to produce an effect on or in inanimate or animate nature.

Gilkey contends that the threat of divine determinism is not reduced by moving the *direction* of God's action *from the future* (as in eschatological theologies) instead of *from eternity* (in classical theology). All this achieves is the 'total abdication' of God from the present,<sup>384</sup> and consequently denigrates the value of the present creative process. Instead, he suggests that 'the problems of theodicy, of human freedom and of the goodness of the future . . . can be resolved only by . . . an explicitly ontological doctrine of the self-limitation in every present of the divine power in relation to the freedom of the creature.'<sup>385</sup> Gilkey's use of the idea

<sup>380</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 249.

<sup>381</sup>Cf. F. Michael McLain's critique of Gilkey on this point ('Narrative Interpretation and the Problem of Double Agency,' in *Divine Action: Studies Inspired by The Philosophical Theology of Austin Farrer*, eds. Brian Hebblethwaite, and Edward Henderson [Edinburgh, UK: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1990], 144-151).

<sup>382</sup>Gilkey, 'Cosmology, Ontology, and the Travail of Biblical Language,' *The Journal of Religion* 41 (1961): 196.

<sup>383</sup>Cobb, 'Natural Causality and Divine Action,' in *God's Activity in the World: The Contemporary Problem*, ed. Owen C. Thomas, in American Academy of Religion series, Studies in Religion, ed. Charley Hardwick, no. 31 [Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983] 101, 115, 114).

<sup>384</sup>In this instance, Gilkey has Moltmann in mind (Gilkey, 'Universal and Immediate Presence,' 97).

of ‘ontological . . . self-limitation’ reflects a certain ambiguity here, since on the one hand, he explicitly rejects any extrinsic reduction of God’s total sovereignty. Thus, he rejects Process theology’s attempt to set ‘an *ontological* limit to God, that is, by conceiving God as a finite factor in the creation of the present.’<sup>386</sup> On the other hand, however, God does not provide the *total* ground of historical reality, because the creature is self-creative to some degree, and creation ‘is the work of God in union with the freedom he creates.’<sup>387</sup> Although, presumably, Gilkey sees this self-limitation of the divine sovereignty as conforming to a regular “pattern” (or “law”), yet the “pattern” itself is determined by the wisdom of God’s moment-by-moment decisions as to which elements of creaturely implementation he will reposit in being, which possibilities he will offer, and which creaturely artefacts he will no longer uphold in being. Gilkey seems to imply that only at some future point (perhaps beyond death) will God no longer sustain the negative associated with each individual. Leaving aside the problems involved in speculating about what might be the requirements imposed on divine self-limitation in order to make possible this kind of world, Gilkey has at least left an unspecified range of actions open to God in order to accomplish God’s ultimate purposes.

God, therefore, is sovereign in the sense of being the ultimate source of being, process, possibilities, judgment and grace (redemption), but ‘not as the all-powerful, extrinsic and necessitating ordainer of what we are and do.’<sup>388</sup> In adopting this view, Gilkey aligns himself ‘unequivocally with the “Arminian” tradition of interpretation, holding that human creativity, both for good or ill, does not reflect the foreordination of God but rather the centered response to events, in judgment, decision and action, of human beings.’<sup>389</sup> Thus, he understands ‘the divine sovereignty’ to work ‘*through* a genuine freedom, as, so to speak, “playing it by ear” in history in the light of what men do.’ He finds support for this view, not only from

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<sup>385</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 235; cf. *ibid.*, 307-308.

<sup>386</sup>Gilkey, ‘Universal and Immediate Presence,’ 97.

<sup>387</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 308.

<sup>388</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 247.

<sup>389</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 413-414, n. 31.



his phenomenological analysis of human experience, but also from 'the Old Testament accounts of history.'<sup>390</sup> Gilkey's model of providence, in this instance, resembles that of Timothy Gorringer's description of providence as 'rough theatre.'<sup>391</sup>

### 'Creative Providence'

Although Gilkey's Reaping the Whirlwind places a central focus on providence as 'God's continuing action in our common life, [and] in the general history in which we live,'<sup>392</sup> his larger project involves a theology of history that includes 'providence, christology and eschatology.'<sup>393</sup> In his view, the combination of these doctrines provides 'a better theological clue to the mystery of history.'<sup>394</sup>

In light of Gilkey's method of arriving at a Christian understanding of the 'ultimate' by means of the interaction of inherited symbols with secular experience of the world, the symbol of 'providence' thus comes to refer to 'the divine ultimacy, experienced in our historical life as providence--an ultimacy that establishes, grounds, limits, judges and rescues the present.'<sup>395</sup>

There is an important ontological connection between God's providential action, the structure of contingent creaturely being and process, and one's experience of creative autonomy:

God's providential presence, the ultimacy that undergirds our being, is experienced and found *through* these characteristics and powers of our finite being and thus is not capable of dissolving them else it would not be experienced and known at all. For ultimacy appears precisely *within* the exercise of our contingent being, the discovery of our relative meanings, the achievement of our relative truths and spiritual creations and the enacting of our free decisions as their possibility. It is the ground, the dimension, the context that makes our

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<sup>390</sup>Gilkey, Reaping, 414, n. 31.

<sup>391</sup>Gorringer, God's Theatre: A Theology of Providence (London, UK: SCM Press, 1991), 81-82.

<sup>392</sup>Gilkey, Reaping, 240.

<sup>393</sup>Gilkey, Reaping, 294.

<sup>394</sup>Gilkey, Reaping, 238.

<sup>395</sup>Gilkey, Reaping, 247.

contingency, relativity, temporality and free human being possible.<sup>396</sup>

Clearly there are both creative and providential types of action reflected in this single divine work, and thus Gilkey, following Schleiermacher, refers to his doctrine of providence as ‘creative providence,’ or ‘providential creativity.’<sup>397</sup>

The first element in Gilkey’s doctrine of providence is that of “*preservation*,” but what God “preserves” or “sustains” is being-in-process-of-becoming. It is always in movement--what it achieves in each moment of judgment and decision is continually reposited, faced with new possibilities, enabled to make a new decision, the “cycle” repeating constantly. God is thus ‘the power of actuality or being that constitutes or reconstitutes being from moment to moment, that brings achieved actuality out of the vanishing mortality of the past into the life of the present; that moves what is objectified and gone into the role of a determining factor in the living present.’<sup>398</sup> Whether this becomes a progressive or degenerative spiral depends on the use made by the creature of its freedom to choose and enact the truly new.

The second component in this doctrine of providence (again reflecting a link with tradition) is that of *concursus*. Although God concurs with creaturely activity in that he not only reposit it in being, but empowers it to choose, this *concursus* respects the autonomy of the creature in its self-actualization.<sup>399</sup> The ability of finite “beings” to unite ‘past actuality and future possibility’ comprises ‘a process of self-determination, a response of centered freedom to its given destiny in the light of real possibilities. Each present is a union of objectified actuality, alternative possibilities and integrating decision.’<sup>400</sup> Since this ‘freedom’ and ability to select from the range of options open to it cannot be wholly derived from past actuality (this would be full determinism), nor from future possibilities (which do not yet exist as actualities), Gilkey postulates that it must again be a *given* from God. ‘As a result, we call this ground or

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<sup>396</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 248.

<sup>397</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 249; cf. 248, 414, n. 32.

<sup>398</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 303.

<sup>399</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 248, 264, 297, 313.

<sup>400</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 304.

power of being, creative of the self-determining reality of each occasion through which it comes to be, the creative “accompanying” or “concurring” providence of God.’<sup>401</sup>

Thus God manifests his sovereignty not only in preserving (or repositing) creaturely being, but also in ‘ordaining and ordering’ ‘possibility for the whole process.’<sup>402</sup> It is at this point that Gilkey employs a reinterpreted version of the traditional ‘*logos*’ concept as the third element in his doctrine of providence, and as reflecting the second aspect of God’s “trinitarian” relation to creation as its transcendent, ‘unconditioned ground’: ‘God, as the ground of future possibility, is at the same time the ground of order and intelligibility, . . . now reconceived in a dynamic, temporal mode.’<sup>403</sup> This ‘realm of possibility’ is not random, not determined solely by the actualities created by creaturely free choices, but rather forms ‘an ordered structure of graded options in continuity with the past,’<sup>404</sup> and therefore remains relevant to it even while it makes possible the genuinely new.<sup>405</sup>

As noted above, however, although this ‘graded and ordered envisionment of God of the infinite realm of possibility’ provides the structure of created reality, it is more than ‘a static timeless order of endlessly repeated forms’:

Rather, for a process view in which “being” is always in the process of becoming through the self-actualisation of novel events, the rational structure of experience represents the ingression of possibilities from the future--perhaps repeated, perhaps new--into the self-creative events of process. Thus the divine *logos* is a creative vision of future possibility, arising out of the infinite divine life, of forms not yet actualised and therefore merely potential, as well as of possible forms already resident in actuality. The *logos* points not to the endless recurrence of the past but to the future and to novelty, to unrealised potentiality, as the ordering divine vision which lures process, nature, social history and personal lives, into new forms of life, of society and of selves.<sup>406</sup>

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<sup>401</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 304-305, 305.

<sup>402</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 251.

<sup>403</sup>Gilkey, ‘God,’ 84; cf. *Reaping*, 314, 305.

<sup>404</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 305.

<sup>405</sup>Gilkey, ‘Universal and Immediate Presence,’ 109.

Thus, 'the future which God brings presupposes the present which he also providentially founds--and both require for their actualization our human creaturely (and often wayward) autonomy, energy, commitment, faith, *and* activity.'<sup>407</sup>

The fourth feature of Gilkey's doctrine of providence is that of judgement or 'nemesis,' as it is combined with grace or redemptive love. Because the ontology of history includes sin or fate in its constitution, providence needs a redemptive aspect. Redemption, however, takes the initial form of judgment or nemesis. If one already understands the negative in history as deriving its ultimate meaning from a model of creative providence, then even nemesis can be seen as possibility of renewal. God's redemptive, reuniting love often appears as judgement since it must oppose that in the creature's freedom which opposes its own good.<sup>408</sup> God's 'ultimately sovereign' love will finally achieve salvation for all.<sup>409</sup> For this reason God's 'forgiveness and reunion on the basis of forgiveness are the center of our hope for time.'<sup>410</sup> One might even interpret the concepts of possibilities, judgment, grace, and redemption as aspects of God's *governance*--thus making explicit another connection to the tradition that Gilkey himself does not specify.

When one recognises his or her alienation from authentic selfhood as it was manifested in Jesus, when one consciously accepts one's finitude and dependence upon God, just then redemption begins to take place.<sup>411</sup> It is faith in God's 'creative sovereignty'<sup>412</sup> and 'creative providence' which makes such conscious decision possible. It is this faith, and this *act* of faith, which grounds hope for the future and therefore redemptive action in the present.

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<sup>406</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 313.

<sup>407</sup>Gilkey, 'Universal and Immediate Presence,' 109.

<sup>408</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 253-265, 258, 264, 267, 288-291; 418, n.68, and n.69; 315-318.

<sup>409</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 298.

<sup>410</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 317.

<sup>411</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 269-270; 283-284.

<sup>412</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 321.

Although eschatology forms a distinct topic from that of creative providence, some note of Gilkey's treatment of it seems to be in order because of the role eschatology plays in providing the goal and shape of providence.

### **Creative Providence and Eschatology**

Gilkey notes that 'the goal of providence, the character of God's hidden work within the ambiguity of social existence, is defined and so clarified both eschatologically and christologically.' It is defined christologically by Jesus, who 'as the Christ [is] transparent to the ultimate power, meaning and love of God and so gives in promise the character of the kingdom as a community of the fullness of being, meaning and love.' Eschatologically, therefore, God's goal 'for history and beyond history' is 'the promised kingdom as the community of humans' in which each individual experiences 'the power to be and to determine . . . [his or her] own being for the future,' enjoys life in 'community' as 'the participation of all in the common life' in the context of 'responsible love.'<sup>413</sup> Only against this background does present history find its true and full meaning.

Creative providence, under the conditions of temporal existence, does not complete God's goal for creation--this will only be achieved in eternity, which, although based upon the achievements of history in time, will supersede both sinful ways of relating and the ability to abuse the gift of freedom. In taking this view Gilkey follows Augustine and Calvin in giving eschatology a defining role in his theology of history.<sup>414</sup> It must be noted, however, that given the epistemological limits set by his natural theology approach, as it is based on a phenomenological analysis of the ontology of the human experience of history and on the 'eidetic shape' of key Christian symbols, Gilkey has to admit that what can be said about 'eschatological hope . . . is very tentative indeed.'<sup>415</sup> One can only speculate, on the basis of his or her present experience of 'God as power or being, as truth and as love,' and on one's experience of a lure toward 'authentic' being, taken in concert

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<sup>413</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 288-289; cf. *ibid.*, 267, 287-299.

<sup>414</sup>Cf. Gilkey, *Reaping*, 240, 293.

<sup>415</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 296.

with the present experience of 'the redemptive forces of history,' that there awaits an ultimate completion or perfection of these experiences of 'reunion' and reconciliation in the ultimate 'harmony' of the divine life itself.<sup>416</sup> Given this basis, instead of a hope based upon a sovereignly given, revealed and enacted promise, does one not rather have a hope *for* hope, a hope *in* hope, and perhaps, in the end, only a *wish* for an ultimate hope?

While Gilkey rightly highlights the important connection between providence and eschatology, his vision for how God will achieve his goal for creation is vague, and perhaps pantheistic.<sup>417</sup> Although Gilkey (contra Whitehead) makes *God* (not 'creativity') the ultimate ground,<sup>418</sup> he still seems to run the risk of making creation an emanation (albeit a freely posited one) of God's own being. Two features of Gilkey's work support this conclusion. First, the being of both God and creatures have, intrinsically, *process* characteristics. Only in this way can God's experience be spoken of as enlarged or enriched,<sup>419</sup> and this same feature makes the final shape of God's eternal purposes dependent upon creaturely choices in time. Second, Gilkey speaks of an ultimate completion of 'our being with an "alien" righteousness, with the creative perfection of the divine love, and with the transforming harmony of the divine experience.'<sup>420</sup> While one ought not to conclude too much from this ambiguous language, it at least seems to imply that only when present created life is re-created and in some profound sense reunited with, or "*subsumed*" into, the infinite 'consequent divine experience'<sup>421</sup> will it be complete.

Gilkey takes as the defining example of this new life the resurrected existence of Christ,<sup>422</sup> but because he does not understand Jesus to be divine, Gilkey fails to appropriate the resources in the traditional symbol of christology for explicating both

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<sup>416</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 295-296, 297.

<sup>417</sup>Cf. Gilkey, *Reaping*, 297-298.

<sup>418</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 249.

<sup>419</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 297, 428, n. 47.

<sup>420</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 295-296, 297, 298.

<sup>421</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 317, 318; cf. *ibid.*, 297.



the unity and distinction between Jesus and the Father, and subsequently, between humans and the Father. Thus, the most he can say about 'Jesus as the Christ',<sup>423</sup> is that he is the best example available, under the conditions of *time*, of cooperation between God's offer of providential possibilities and human actualisation of those possibilities, of God's purposes being fulfilled for the human creature. Two further questions arise at this point: first, since 'the final kingdom . . . is not in history,'<sup>424</sup> can one really know what life under the conditions of eternity will look like, apart from a more direct revelation from God; and a second, closely related question: if insight into the character of life in the kingdom derives from a religious 'intuition,' can one really specify which of the aspects of the ontology of historical life will enjoy completion?

Although Gilkey does not make it clear whether historical being and experience, as such, comes to an end 'in the infinity of the consequent divine experience,'<sup>425</sup> or whether, as *historical* beings humans enter into a perfected *way of relating* to God, to others, and to our own authentic selves,<sup>426</sup> his requirement of a link between present historical ontology and that of eternity would lead one to expect some kind of processive ontology even there. From this perspective his view of creative providence would resemble an Irenaean soul-making theodicy in which the degree of otherness (and therefore autonomy) achieved in temporal existence will be perfected in a higher (authentic) life of historical being and relating in eternity. This would accord well with his close linkage of creation, providence, and eschatology. Thus, the transition from this life to the next (through death and resurrection), while taking up the positive features of a life achieved here, would seem itself to constitute a creative and perfecting act. At this point, however, one is led to ask whether Gilkey's model does not after all require the kind of divine intervention he does not allow within the present, temporal frame of reference? Wiles avoided this potential

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<sup>422</sup>Cf. Gilkey, *Reaping*, 266, 267-270, 280-285, 314, 316-318.

<sup>423</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 317.

<sup>424</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 318.

<sup>425</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 318.

<sup>426</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 317.

problem by suggesting that immortality is *intrinsic* to the very constitution of humans.

Gilkey, like Moltmann,<sup>427</sup> is rightly concerned to maintain a strong link between what God and humans achieve in historical constructions in the present, and the eschatological future of the kingdom: 'eschatology does not replace but depends on and completes God's providential work in history.'<sup>428</sup> Faith and hope in the present are rooted in God's 'creative sovereignty',<sup>429</sup> that is, in the fact that in *any* historical situation God is able to present creative possibilities which make possible truly new, redemptive kairotic moments.<sup>430</sup> The idea seems to be that since God is eternal and unconditioned, creation can never out-sin God's ability to offer redemptive possibilities.<sup>431</sup> But if God is self-limited to working '*through* our freedom and [is therefore] *limited by* our freedom',<sup>432</sup> unless he is going to change his way of relating, it is hard to see how the abuse of freedom can ever finally be conquered.

Gilkey, himself, recognises that without some definitive eschatological transformation, the sin that arises from the human abuse of freedom can never be eradicated from their relationships, no matter how many perfect possibilities God offers them.<sup>433</sup> Yet, Gilkey can refer to the salvation of 'all that has actual being.'<sup>434</sup> If, as Gilkey argues, all reality (including God) is primarily processive in character, then this phrase implies the freezing of process in eternity, which seems to negate

<sup>427</sup>Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, 'Preface to the New Paperback Edition,' trans. Margaret Kohl, in Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology, trans. James W. Leitch (London, UK: SCM Press Ltd., 1967; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 84.

<sup>428</sup>Gilkey, Reaping, 241; cf. *ibid.*, 244, 297.

<sup>429</sup>Gilkey, Reaping, 315, 316, 321.

<sup>430</sup>Gilkey, Reaping, 285.

<sup>431</sup>Gilkey, Reaping, 265.

<sup>432</sup>Gilkey, Reaping, 279. Cf. John J. O'Donnell's critique of Schubert Ogden on this point (Trinity and Temporality: The Christian Doctrine of God in the Light of Process Theology and the Theology of Hope, Oxford Theological Monographs, eds. J. Barr, P. W. Bide, J. Macquarrie, et. al. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1983), 181.

<sup>433</sup>Gilkey, Reaping, 265-266; cf. *ibid.*, 276, 278-279, 315, 321.

Gilkey's basic ontology of reality as relational and historical. At the very least, it appears that, after all, God's providential work in history must consist of more than a continuation of the status quo, it must be capable also of particular divine actions bringing history (and the individuals who create it) into another level or plane of existence.

One is forced to ask whether Gilkey can have it both ways, that is, hold to a view of God's sovereignty that is defined as a loving self-limitation of God's power, while also affirming a final overcoming of all that is negative in creaturely co-creations and in creaturely ways of being. In any case, regardless of the ambiguity, the foregoing summary depicts Gilkey's model of providence and eschatology as constituting the ultimate meaning of history. Because the connection between history and providence is not easily restored, a more explicit summary of the way Gilkey links them may help to further define the problem, as well as point to areas needing strengthening.

### **PROVIDENCE AS A CONTEXT OF MEANING FOR HISTORY**

The question of God's involvement in history, and the kind of meaning that provides for human experience of the world, leads ultimately to the question of hope, for a key aspect of meaning is that of significance. For example, Langdon Gilkey suggests that 'Providence and *das Nichtige* are closely related concepts,' because it is not a lack of "purpose" so much as it is a lack of 'a meaningful structure in relation to which our work, our plans, our joys, and our day-to-day life find significance, and so continuity,' which threatens us with 'Nothingness.' It is providence which establishes and maintains a context in which and out of which the self can exist, thus ensuring the significance and continuity of the self, and so the future of the self, and hence its hope.<sup>435</sup>

Albert Outler, in his reinterpretation of providence, stresses that the doctrine traditionally was concerned with God's presence in the world (and therefore in history), a concern no less important today.<sup>436</sup> The area of difficulty, for Christian

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<sup>434</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 297.

<sup>435</sup>Langdon Gilkey, "The Concept of Providence in Contemporary Theology," *The Journal of Religion* 43, no. 3 (July, 1963): 189.

theology in a secular context, is not so much the existence of God as it is God's active providential presence in the world.<sup>437</sup> As noted, for example, in the above review of Wiles' treatment of providence, he does not question the *existence* of God, only the traditional ways of picturing God's *relation* to the creaturely realm.

G. C. Berkouwer also raised the issue of history and meaning in connection with a belief in providence.<sup>438</sup> In his view, however, a doctrine of providence is primarily a personal faith issue, and must be based on the Word of God, not on an interpretation of the vicissitudes of history, either personal, national, or cosmic.<sup>439</sup> But this still leaves open the question of the relation of providence to the wider spheres of historical reality.

Gilkey takes up this concern with providence, history and meaning, giving a greater emphasis to the issue of corporate history because of the importance in Western culture of modern historical consciousness.<sup>440</sup> He argues that classical doctrines of providence tended to see God as 'an all-determining Absolute of past and present,' while eschatological theologies like Moltmann's understand God to totally abdicate any involvement in present history, thus removing himself 'into the relative chill of abstract, because future, possibility.' Gilkey also sees this abdication of present involvement in the deistic view of the God-world relation. He wishes, therefore, to find a position somewhere between what he understands as the all-determining God of classical providence and the absent God of the futurist and deist models.<sup>441</sup> In the context of the authors surveyed in this thesis, Gilkey's model of the God-history relation would then fit somewhere between the classical view on the one hand (as represented by Paul Helm), and Moltmann and Wiles on the other.<sup>442</sup>

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<sup>436</sup>Outler, *Who Trusts*, 24.

<sup>437</sup>Outler, *Who Trusts*, 27.

<sup>438</sup>Berkouwer, *The Providence of God*, trans. Lewis B. Smedes, Studies in Dogmatics (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952, rpt. 1983), 7.

<sup>439</sup>Berkouwer, *Providence*, 29; cf. 162, 166.

<sup>440</sup>Cf. Gilkey, *Reaping*, 207-208.

<sup>441</sup>Gilkey, 'Universal and Immediate Presence,' 97.

<sup>442</sup>Gilkey also includes Wolfhart Pannenberg, Johannes Metz, Gustavo Gutierrez, Rubem Alves, and Carl Braaten in his assessment of the eschatological theologies (*Reaping*, 227).

Gilkey notes that ‘for liberalism providence provided the sole clue to the meaning of history; for neo-orthodoxy it was christology; and for contemporary political theologies it has been eschatology.’<sup>443</sup> In order to find a third way between theistic supernaturalism and deistic naturalism Gilkey suggests that a better theology of history can be derived from a combination of ‘providence, christology and eschatology’<sup>444</sup> which funds *relative* historical progress. Since God continually repositis the being of past actualisations of free decisions, God is continually co-creating each entity.<sup>445</sup> Thus, ‘continuous creativity, providence and eschatology unite with one another [*sic*] with finite freedom as the way in which God creates the moving process, sustains it in its temporal being and directs it through its own freedom to its fulfillment.’<sup>446</sup>

In keeping with the nineteenth century liberal theologies, he wishes to affirm the central importance of history in a doctrine of providence, but without adopting their largely optimistic view of progress.<sup>447</sup> However, he ‘takes history seriously,’ not only as the locus for God’s redemptive activity, but as itself under God’s governing care. In other words, Gilkey refuses to adopt what he understands as the neo-orthodox and eschatological theologies’ reduction or negation of the significance of contemporary history in God’s redemptive (and so providential) purposes. To do so would, in his view, destroy any hope of finding meaning in the present crisis of meaninglessness, negate any hope for bettering future existence (in *this* life, at least), and paralyse any praxis for political change and renewal.<sup>448</sup>

When Gilkey looks to the Bible, however, for resources for relating providence and history, he finds himself forced to turn to the Old Testament. The New Testament, while it ‘presupposes the creative and providential activity of God

<sup>443</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 238.

<sup>444</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 238.

<sup>445</sup>Cf. Gilkey, *Reaping*, 303, 307, 308.

<sup>446</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 312.

<sup>447</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 238, 239.

<sup>448</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 238.

portrayed in the Old,' tends to eclipse the relation of divine providence to present history by focusing instead on the 'redemptive activity of God in and through Christ, in the church and to come in the future.'<sup>449</sup>

While he is correct to read New Testament eschatology as *presupposing* 'the creative and providential activity of God portrayed in the Old,'<sup>450</sup> he moves too quickly to assume that the relative eclipse of providence in the New Testament *only* signals a different *focus* from that of providence,<sup>451</sup> and thereby he inadvertently minimises the importance the New Testament attributes to God's new providential work in history--and thus sees the New Testament as undermining the significance of present history itself. But this shift in focus to a different aspect of God's work in the world might also reflect a deeper insight into God's *providential* relation to the world. As Frank Tupper notes, 'God's work of reconciliation illuminates and clarifies God's providential work in the whole of creation and thereby uniquely in the arena of contingent human history.'<sup>452</sup> One might say that God's new works of incarnation, redemption, and sanctification, through the Son and the Spirit, are themselves new providential works, paradigmatic instances of God's ongoing presence and care. Since Gilkey, presumably, thinks that God was working in both the Old and New Testaments as he continues to work in all cultures,<sup>453</sup> then God's pervasive providential creativity itself *continues* to provide the same overarching context of meaning for individual and corporate history in the New Testament as it did in the Old and does in the present. Gilkey, however, has already ruled out the miraculous in the Old Testament accounts of providence, and this in turn means that he is not reading the New Testament view of providence as its authors would have understood it from the Old Testament. This is ironic, since in the Old Testament he finds not only a clear doctrine of God's providential presence in both Israel's and in

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<sup>449</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 410, n. 4; 241-242.

<sup>450</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 241.

<sup>451</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 410, n. 4.

<sup>452</sup>Frank Tupper, 'The Providence of God in Christological Perspective,' *Review and Expositor* 82, no. 4 (Fall 1985): 580.

<sup>453</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 244, 267, 268, 284, 317.



general history, but also a shifting interpretation of that presence as their experience of God changed. He uses this latter characteristic of the Old Testament view of divine providence as creating the precedent for his own reinterpretation in light of modern historical consciousness.<sup>454</sup>

Gilkey's hermeneutic also means that the way God acts in the New Testament, providentially and trinitarianly, in bringing in redemption, must now rule out the miraculous, a view which no doubt accounts for the fact that Jesus as the Christ is reduced by Gilkey to the paradigmatic *example* of God's providential and eschatological intent for all other humans. Thus, Gilkey's hermeneutic entails only an '*analogical*'<sup>455</sup> reading of providential activity in both the Old and New Testaments, which means that God is not thought of as acting directly on the secondary level. While this view of divine action may appease the modern sense of human autonomy and the naturalistic presuppositions of modern science, it tends to reduce God's providential activity to a uniform level across Old Testament, New Testament, and subsequent eras. It imposes a Modern set of presuppositions on the Christian symbol set which fails to take into account the New Testament sense of the *developing* aspect of God's providential relation to individuals and the history they create. This can be illustrated in the *new* life of *empowerment* and *direction* through the Spirit, after Pentecost. It can also be seen in the already-not-yet aspect of the eschatological kingdom in the world. In the New Testament God's providential and saving activity moves to a new level of intensity, specificity and clarity--it 'restores Creation on a higher plane.'<sup>456</sup>

Gilkey's model also fails to allow for a more fully interactive and communicative relation of God to individuals, and through them, to the structures of their corporate history. While his reinterpretation of New Testament experiences of personal and communicative encounter with God in analogical terms may *account*

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<sup>454</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 244.

<sup>455</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 241-242.

<sup>456</sup>Leo Scheffczyk, *Creation and Providence*, trans. Richard Strachan (London, UK: Burns and Oates Limited; New York, NY: Herder and Herder, 1970), 32.

for those experiences, it does not *explain* the full range of their original meaning, nor explain what exactly was *new* in the new life offered through the Son and Spirit.

As noted above, the science-theology conversation seems to be finding more room for the possibility of special divine action than had previously been allowed. Gilkey's model of providence already has at least an implicit element of efficient causality, as seen in the repositing of past actualisations, providing power (and therefore autonomy and freedom) to make decisions and produce actions which actually affect God's own experience, which make a real difference in the shape of history, and which limit the range of possibilities God can offer to the next moment; and in the effecting of the resurrection of individuals. It would appear, therefore, that the only reason Gilkey must exclude the concept of direct divine action on the level of secondary causes is not so much on scientific grounds, as on the basis of what a secular culture considers acceptable. The key element defining Gilkey's particular balance between God's sovereignty and human freedom, between general and special providence, is his view of God's self-limitation as constitutive for human ontology. The result of this view, however, leaves Gilkey with a rather vague conception of the relation between providence and the relative meaning it provides to present history, and the ultimate meaning supplied to that history by eschatology, which providence, in some unspecified way, helps to usher in.

Although Gilkey has been criticised for introducing God (in his providential role) as a necessary factor for finding meaning in the ambiguities of history,<sup>457</sup> he notes that even those who insist ('a priori') that there are no ultimate or metaphysical sources of meaning, do in fact 'smuggle in surreptitiously a structure of meaning, and so a basis for social hope, in terms of science and "myths" derived therefrom.'<sup>458</sup> Thus, Pasewark's criticism of Gilkey for bringing in 'God' as a factor for a doctrine of providence fails to take into account the significance of Gilkey's interpretation of the divinely given nature of the universal elements in secular experience of history, and also fails to take into account Gilkey's view that the historical self-consciousness

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<sup>457</sup> Kyle Pasewark, 'Power, Freedom, and History: The Symbol of Divine Providence in Langdon Gilkey's Theology,' in *The Theology of Langdon B. Gilkey*, 325, n. 71. Pasewark does not fault the use of the God hypothesis for other areas of theology.

<sup>458</sup> Gilkey, *Reaping*, 370, n. 7.

of modern men and women has its roots 'in the biblical tradition and the understanding of human being found there.'<sup>459</sup> It is precisely because Gilkey introduces the idea of a transcendent source for the secular experiences of grace and redemption that he feels he has the basis for a coherent theory of meaning in history. Gilkey is attempting to construct a theology of history which, precisely because it is a *theo*-logy, provides a more experientially adequate and coherent model of actual *secular* experience of ultimacy. Gilkey argues that his theological interpretation of history survives or fails as a *whole*.<sup>460</sup> Thus, his thesis that human experience of ultimacy and meaning is engendered by a divine ground is both a presupposition and a conclusion--related to each other in a dialectical fashion. Given the close connection between creaturely ontology and divine creative providence, the synergism between divine Ground and human autonomy, it would be impossible to exclude God from Gilkey's doctrine of providence and still have a Christian theology of history, or even to describe the human experience of history in terms of ultimate meaning.

Gilkey argues that only if one can discern a dimension in present history which can be explained only by reference to God can the meaning of, and hope in and for history be sustained. Gilkey insists that it is God, as Creator and Redeemer, who provides the ultimate context of meaning for human experience,<sup>461</sup> and therefore who imbues one's consciousness of transition and change with a sense of purpose and meaning. The idea that human histories are not simply random events, but somehow participate in and contribute to an overall purpose is a central concern of a doctrine of providence.

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<sup>459</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 409, n. 1. There appears, however, to be an inconsistency in Gilkey's analysis of modern historical experience at this point. If the modern historical consciousness of Western culture has its roots in 'the *biblical* tradition' (italics mine), can Gilkey in turn assume that his ontology of humans as historical in their self-consciousness applies universally?

<sup>460</sup>Gilkey's method differs from David Tracy's in that Gilkey's model gains its credibility only as an integrated *whole*, and not upon the basis of each of the parts (or 'moments') being *first* 'validated one by one and on their own terms' (*Reaping*, 371, n. 17; cf. *ibid.*, 144); cf. Kelsey on the importance of treating theological models as wholes (*The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* [London, UK: SCM Press, 1975], 136-138).

<sup>461</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 129; cf. *ibid.*, 130, 311.

In trying to reinstate providence in a Christian theology of history, one might say that Gilkey is attempting to retain the concept of *general* providence, but a general providence which does more than maintain existence, even more than a self-developing existence. He wants to see history itself as under God's ongoing (active) tutelage and guidance, through a divine sharing with creatures (especially humans) the wisdom (as possibilities) and power (as continually repositing actualities, with freedom to choose) to shape that history. In this way he moves a step nearer to special providence than Wiles, but without actually accepting the idea of interventions or miracles (because of God's self-limitation). Through the natural means of creaturely actions (albeit as guided by God's offer of relevant possibilities) 'the appearance of the new, even a revolutionary new,' is made possible.<sup>462</sup> But Gilkey's general providence remains vague as to how God will eventually overcome the abuse of freedom which is the source of sin and fate in history.<sup>463</sup>

Since Gilkey has opened the door to special divine actions further than Wiles would allow (but without moving beyond a concept of general providence), might it be possible to conceive of providence as playing an even more important role in giving meaning to individual and corporate histories if God could be conceived as acting in a more direct and personal way in the affairs of history? This has clearly been the view of traditional doctrines of providence, and of both Old and New Testaments. The story of God's redemptive actions in the New Testament, moreover, pictures God the Father (through the mediation of the Son and the Spirit) as taking up a direct relation to both individuals and their history. This New Testament witness becomes the basis for the trinitarian theologies of providence reviewed in Chapter Four, below.

Gilkey, in arguing for the criterion of maintaining a link between what humans co-create in history *now*, with *eschatological* reality, is right to retain the symbol 'resurrection.' It serves this criterion more adequately than does immortality (Wiles). It allows for a structure of continuity in dis-continuity, which Gilkey's

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<sup>462</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 239.

<sup>463</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 237. Cf. Edward Farley's critique on this point (review of *Reaping the Whirlwind: A Christian Interpretation of History*, by Langdon Gilkey, in *Religious Study Review* 4, no. 4 [October 1978]: 235, 237).

model of providence seems to assume. As noted above, however, a problem arises at this point since Gilkey denies the supernatural element of Christ's resurrection as a divine intervention breaking into *this* realm of history. If, however, the regularities underlying the "laws" of nature are grounded, not in a once-for-all given order of nature (Deism), then they must be rooted in God's personal faithfulness (a concept implied by Gilkey's notion of 'creative providence' or 'continuous creativity',<sup>464</sup>). Thus, Gilkey's own system of creative possibilities calls for the extraordinary, the 'radically new.'<sup>465</sup> As a new work of God far above present creaturely potentials, the resurrection still meets Gilkey's criterion of relevance.<sup>466</sup> If one holds to the concept of a personal God, and to a continuous creation, then it would seem that the option is left open for God to effect within history a revelation of himself which manifests an eschatological quality of interpersonal relating, a revelation which functions not only as promise and goal, but also as empowerment.

### **INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF GILKEY'S MODEL**

Clearly in Gilkey's model, God is spirit, and relates to creation on several different levels. As the One who creates, continually re-co-creates, and perfects through the lure of love, God is at once the ground of being, truth (structure and meaning), and redeeming (empowering) love. While such a functional trinitarian relation to the world may not *require* an ontological Trinity, it would at least seem that such a differentiated relation might allow for the possibility of one, and once permitted, such a Trinity might provide the resources for a more clearly defined model of how a personal God relates to the world on three distinct levels. Gilkey's model would be strengthened if he had developed a more differentiated concept of the relation between time and eternity, and between God and humans.

Gilkey has defined providence as a symbol within a larger system of symbols, and has reinterpreted the symbol of providence as a way of speaking of the ultimate (and therefore religious) concerns which confront humans in the historical, social and

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<sup>464</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 311.

<sup>465</sup>Gilkey, 'Universal and Immediate Presence,' 109.

<sup>466</sup>Gilkey, 'Universal and Immediate Presence,' 109.



political dimensions of their experiences of life. One very important feature of Gilkey's reinterpretation of providence is the way in which his phenomenological and existential analysis of modern historical experience takes into account the ambiguity manifested in nature and in human experiences of destiny and fate, freedom and compulsion. Whether or not one thinks his model of providence is the best available explanation of one's experience of the world, this particular element of his model fulfils an important criterion for a doctrine of providence: it takes into account the negative aspects of human experience as well as the positive.

In an important sense, Gilkey has sought to retain the significance of the individual in God's providential activity, while also restoring the efficacy and significance of creaturely history in that activity. It would seem, however, that Gilkey has been forced to accept a kind of paradox in his model of providence: without letting go of human freedom, he also wants to conclude that God's provision of being, freedom and grace will be sufficient to win all people to God, in the "end." But he does not really have an adequate basis for this double assertion, since he seems to have sacrificed the kind of divine sovereignty and divine action which would ultimately ensure the fulfilment of God's plans. At a minimum, if this lacuna represents neither paradox nor contradiction, it does reflect an inadequately worked out ontology of divine love--that is, he fails to show the mechanism by which this love (expressed in the self-limited way of Gilkey's model) can eventually redeem all people without violating their freedom. It would seem that there is an intrinsic incoherence in Gilkey's model--his panentheistic universalism seems to require a determinism his Arminianism disallows.

The logic of Gilkey's model would seem to imply that the *concrete* and *particular* structures of divine-human, human-human, and human-non-human relations in eternity may continue to evolve, while the *quality* of relating will be perfected at each level of capacity for relating. Perhaps one could say the *form* of the "final" establishment of the kingdom will continue to depend upon the synergism of divine and human creativity, while the *content* of that kingdom, the *way of being and relating*, will be perfected by divine fiat. Otherwise one could ask, Why have a "next life" at all?



This view of the kingdom would seem to correlate with Jesus' direction to 'seek first his [the Father's] kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well,'<sup>467</sup> that is, seek first the *quality* of kingdom life, including particular forms of just societal structures, and the physical bases of life will be available for all. This view of the kingdom allows it to have the already-not-yet character suggested by Gilkey. It makes the kingdom to consist primarily of right relations, and therefore to be an urgent, primary and real possibility both now and in eternity. Thus, insofar as one enters the kingdom in the present (in time), in terms of right relating, one can carry over into eternity the same mode of relating, and the healthful concrete structures of societal life which naturally arise out of these dispositions. This view of the kingdom gives a strong focus to soteriology, but to soteriology in service of the purpose of creation, and therefore to soteriology in light of providential eschatology. This soteriological focus provides a way of serving Gilkey's purpose of saving not only individuals, but the historical realities they create, in an eschatological community.

A question for this thesis then becomes: Would a trinitarian doctrine of providence facilitate the creation of a model of a *differentiated* doctrine of providence in which Father, Son and Spirit each sustain (according to the uniqueness of their being) a particular feature of created reality, especially in the area of kingdom community relations?

## CONCLUSION

Even though, because of their acceptance of a modern scientific assessment of natural causation, both Wiles and Gilkey reject the biblical concept of God acting and speaking in signs, wonders and audible voices, they both see a doctrine of providence as having an important function in explicating one's experience of God and of the world. First, it thematises that experience. Second, it enables one to evaluate his or her experiences of the world as to whether they reveal 'traces' of God acting. And third, it enables one (by faith) to "see" God acting, or at least to discern *how* God might be acting. This latter feature of a doctrine of providence enables

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<sup>467</sup>Matt. 6:33 RSV.

both Wiles and Gilkey to speak of some experiences as being more religiously significant because they reveal more of God's purposes.

Both raise the issue of the relation between God's sovereignty, as represented in his providential decrees, and human freedom. They retain belief in the Christian creator God and some form of providence by raising and meeting objections to the idea of divine decrees with a doctrine of divine self-limitation. In their view, only such a qualification of divine providence accords with the pervasive human experience of the high degree of ambiguity, randomness, evil and suffering in the world, and yet enables one to retain belief in a good God. The result of each of their models is a kind of 'rough theatre.' This version of providence avoids making God the sole initiator of events and actions on the creaturely level, and allows for a true openness of the future, for co-creativity and co-responsibility of humans for the shape and meaning of history.

It is clear that in the natural theology of Wiles it is special providence which suffers an eclipse. While Gilkey's model moves a step further and supports God's particular and universal *influence* on each particular occasion of experience, it still falls short of God acting directly or unilaterally to bring about a particular effect in the space-time continuum--God is limited to what creatures have already made of their prior possibilities. In this regard, Gilkey's model would seem to satisfy Wiles' moral requirement for God's providential action: no one receives preferential treatment from God. Thus, even in grace there is a kind of "fateful chance" which limits how much God can guide the actions of humans.

Several questions suggest themselves at this point. Does the kind of general providence advocated by Wiles and Gilkey actually satisfy the type of human autonomy they think God has created? If such autonomy, as the basis of becoming an other, is the purpose of God's creation of humans, why would God not wish to then enter into direct communication with individuals? Is the idea of God communicating particularly and directly a scientifically outdated, mythological, and morally reprehensible concept? Might it not, rather, reflect the highest context for human existence? Does human freedom require an exclusion of more direct communication (or fellowship) with God? If they can think of God as able to limit his powers in order to make space and time for creatures, might God not also be able

to accommodate his interaction and communication to the human level without violating the principles of free relating? As noted above, contemporary discussions between theology and science have at least opened the door to new ways of conceiving of God acting in the space-time causal nexus in order to produce particular effects, and thus to establish fellowship with humans.

Even though the question of christology is not the primary focus of Wiles' and Gilkey's doctrines of providence, their christologies help to give point to some of the questions just mentioned. It at least raises the question as to the distinctive providential role played by Jesus Christ in salvation history, and therefore his meaning for providence in present history. Both Wiles and Gilkey perceive Jesus as the Christ to be the definitive example of authentic human being and relationality (at least for Christians). In their view, however, Jesus is not divine, and therefore does not constitute a *special* revelation of God's self to humans--special revelation understood in the sense of requiring a direct divine act. One is led to ask, however, whether this view of Jesus actually gives an adequate interpretation of his own self-understanding. For example, was his practice of speaking to the Father in prayer only an exercise in soliloquy (Wiles), and if so, then what confidence does one have that he actually did successfully carry out God's best options for his life (Gilkey)? Moreover, if Jesus mistakenly thought the Father heard and answered his prayers in an "interventionist" manner, then to what degree did this mistaken concept of God's relation to the universe lead to mistakes in Jesus' working out of his own destiny?

Wiles brings into focus the importance of thinking in terms of God's creation of the whole. This implies an important, intrinsic unity of all God's works *ad extra*. Gilkey's model makes this unity of divine works even more explicit, and also moves the discussion more overtly toward a relational ontology--with his talk of the divine lure. Gilkey's God is more directly involved in the events within creation, and specifically, with individual humans. This creative and providential ground becomes the ontological basis for the formation of an eschatological, divine-human community. This raises the question as to whether the models of Wiles and Gilkey adequately picture life in the present as correlating to life in the eschaton, that is, with respect to personal interaction? Can humans be constituted as personal beings, because created by a personal creator, without ever being able to communicate with

God in a more direct fashion than inductive inference? It seems doubtful whether their models of providence provide an adequate account of the personal experience of grace and guidance so strongly held by much of the Christian tradition.

Since neither Wiles nor Gilkey hold to a doctrine of the Trinity, this issue cannot be addressed by appealing to the personal nature of God as reflected in the actions of the Son and Spirit. Their choice here reflects an important methodological point: the shape of one's doctrine of God, and subsequent doctrine of providence, depends in a fundamental way upon one's methodological presuppositions. In this case, since neither Wiles nor Gilkey hold to univocal language about God acting in the world, the decision to jettison the doctrine of the Trinity rests on methodological principles.

Furthermore, the kind of space between God and humans that Wiles and Gilkey define as being necessary for human freedom to develop would seem to preclude any level of personal contact with God--whether as Spirit or Son. In both models God must remain at the subconscious level, present only as an anonymous 'lure,' or even more remotely hidden in the 'grain of things.'

Wiles and Gilkey have faced squarely contemporary problems with providence by limiting God's involvement in history to the level of general providence. This has required a minimising of the more relational and personal aspect of the Christian God--as embodied in a doctrine of the Trinity. The next chapter will look at two theologians who are trinitarian, and ask whether they find in this doctrine resources for a doctrine of providence which ameliorates some of the problems with providence noted in Chapter One.

## CHAPTER 3

### TRINITARIAN THEOLOGIANS NON-TRINITARIAN PROVIDENCE PAUL HELM AND JOHN SANDERS

#### INTRODUCTION

Wiles and Gilkey advance two models of providence which aim at reclaiming history as a locus of God's presence and action. However, their concrete focus for this providential presence is either vague and impersonal (Wiles--the general 'grain' of things), or centred mostly in the human response to, and transformation by, the subtle, persuasive lure of God's initial aim (Gilkey).

One of the fundamental questions with which both Wiles and Gilkey struggle is the problem of the relation between divine sovereignty and human freedom. This question constitutes a longstanding and central point of contention between models of providence, and even when not extensively engaged, it remains as an underlying concern.<sup>468</sup> This Chapter will look at two theologians (Paul Helm and John Sanders) who represent opposite sides in this ongoing debate and whose models of providence are defined according to how they resolve this problem. Both Helm and Sanders have used the designation of 'risky' versus 'risk-free' to describe the basic difference between their views.<sup>469</sup> Even though they select only a narrow aspect of providence

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<sup>468</sup>This can be illustrated by Terence Tiessen's recent survey of models of providence as they address this issue (*Providence and Prayer: How Does God Work in the World?* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000]).

<sup>469</sup>Helm is correct to point out that this designation actually represents two families of views (*The Providence of God*, in *Contours of Christian Theology*, series ed. Gerald Bray [Leicester, UK: InterVarsity Press, 1993], 39). Ardel Caneday, arguing for a Calvinist view of providence, critiques Sanders for using this categorisation, claiming that it is an overly simplistic labelling of models ('Putting God at Risk: A Critique of John Sanders's View of Providence,' *Trinity Journal* 20, ns [1999]: 134). In spite of this criticism, however, both Helm and Sanders have usefully employed it as

as the main focus of their discussion, nevertheless, they claim to construct a comprehensive theology of providence.

As noted in Chapter One, problems associated with this debate lie at the root of the modern loss of confidence in providence. This question is especially relevant in light of the fact that both the monarchical view of God and the immanent-evolutionary model of God's relation to the world have suffered discredit along with the concepts of providence associated with them.

Both authors are aware of the sense of contradiction experienced by Christians who try to retain belief in divine providence in the face of its apparent absence in the world. Each author, in his own way, seeks to champion a model of providence which can account for this problem, that is, serve as a credible meaning-making model of the God-world relation in which God's apparent absence constitutes part of the solution. In order to achieve this goal, both hold to the comprehensive scope of providence and, in differing versions, to particular or personal providence.

Gilkey recognised that the modern understanding of freedom as 'creative of the new,' and not just as the voluntary willing of the divine will, did not represent the views of all those in the 'entire modern period,' nor of everyone in contemporary Western culture.<sup>470</sup> Paul Helm and John Sanders represent two streams of contemporary Protestant theology which have not accepted the idea of self-limitation in God's relation to the world to the extent that Gilkey does, nor of the radical kind of "hands off" freedom accorded to creation that Wiles advocates. They represent, instead, a more confessional type of theology, concerned with clarifying how more traditional understandings of God's interaction with the world can still be held as credible.

Paul Helm constructs a statement of providence from within the Reformed tradition. Because God's sovereign control constitutes such an important emphasis in this model of providence, Helm's primary concern is to defend God's absolute sovereignty (and a risk-free model of providence), and yet avoid making God

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a heuristic tool or as a kind of shorthand for getting at the fundamental debate which divides their perspectives on providence.

<sup>470</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 395, n. 36, 395, n. 34.



culpable for evil in the world, especially for human sin. To this end he argues for a compatibilist view of human freedom. John Sanders adopts an Arminian view of God's relation to humans, positing a 'risk' model of providence in which God sovereignly limits himself as to how much of his purpose he will achieve and, more importantly, how he will achieve it. God has conferred on humans the power to thwart at least some of God's desires for them, although his ultimate purposes will prevail.<sup>471</sup>

In spite of their fundamental differences with regard to their models of providence, both Helm and Sanders maintain a strong view of the Bible as special revelation, and they believe the Christian God is a Trinity. Helm, however, does not specifically raise the issue of the relation of the Trinity (as such) to providence, and Sanders only raises it for the resources it holds for understanding God in more personal and relational terms. In adopting this stance toward the relation between Trinity and providence, they represent a common perspective.<sup>472</sup>

Treating the Christian Scriptures as special revelation gives these two models of providence a different methodological base than those of Wiles and Gilkey. Rather than working from the perspective of natural theology (a bottom-up approach) they *begin* with what God has already revealed about himself, his purposes and his actions in Scripture. Instead of having to find hints and patterns in history and in the individual experiences of life, they focus on constructing a model of providence which gives a coherent account of the biblical data upon which it is based.

I will not challenge this methodological decision as such, since their use of scripture constitutes one (key) element in the cluster of doctrines making up their model of providence. In keeping with the theme of this thesis, however, I will ask how each model as a whole answers the question of meaning in human lives, and if and how it incorporates a doctrine of the Trinity in achieving this.

<sup>471</sup>Perhaps I should record here my own prejudices in this debate. Although both Helm's and Sanders' models of freedom seem to embody some unresolved, counter-intuitive claims, both provide coherent arguments for their views. Nevertheless, I am Wesleyan-Arminian in theological perspective, and therefore have stronger sympathies with Sanders' model. In any case, recording this debate is not intended to be a precursor of an attempt to resolve it, but rather to explore what each model contributes to our thesis questions regarding providence, meaning, Trinity and hope.

<sup>472</sup>Cf. Tiessen's non-trinitarian summaries in his Providence and Prayer.

In the earlier part of the overviews of Helm's and Sanders' theologies of providence, I will attempt to set out the key features of their models, offering minimal comment and critique. In the second section of the treatments, I will attempt to bring into focus how their models of providence relate to the issues of Trinity, meaning in history, and divine presence in relation to humans. These sections will involve more extensive critique and interaction with other authors as I seek to probe Helm's and Sanders' models for insight into the possible viability for a trinitarian view of providence.

### PAUL HELM: THE DIVINE CONTROLLER

This section of Chapter Three gives consideration to Paul Helm's strong view of God's sovereign, intimate and ultimate control *over, in and through* all that happens in the world.<sup>473</sup> Such Calvinist models of providence have been referred to disparagingly by some as reflecting the 'monarchical' or 'royal metaphor' of God's relation to the world.<sup>474</sup> Perhaps of all the models considered in this thesis, the monarchical model seems to incur the most disfavour within the academic community and within our culture generally. In spite of the widespread dissatisfaction with the metaphysics underlying Classical Theism,<sup>475</sup> Helm remains committed to the 'unattenuated' God of 'Christian theism'.<sup>476</sup>

For those who continue to work with this model, even such a widespread experience of evil as two world wars is not sufficient to dislodge their faith in this kind of providence, since belief in it is primarily rooted in an infallible divine

<sup>473</sup>Helm, Providence, 22, 23, 25.

<sup>474</sup>McFague, Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987), 63-65.

<sup>475</sup>Cf. Nancy Frankenberry, 'Classical Theism, Panentheism, and Pantheism: On the Relation Between God Construction and Gender Construction,' Zygon 28, no. 1 (March 1993): 30-34; Moltmann, The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God, trans. Margaret Kohl (origin. pub. in Britain as The Trinity and the Kingdom of God by SCM Press Ltd., London, UK; New York, NY: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1981), 10-20; and John Cobb, Jr. and David R. Griffin, Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1976), 8-10.

<sup>476</sup>Helm, Eternal God: A Study of God Without Time (New York, NY: Oxford University Press; Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1988, 1997), 23; cf. Helm, Providence, 16.

revelation, and not based on any amount of experience, positive or negative.<sup>477</sup> For that reason, those who argue for this model can derive a sense of security from their experience of the world because of their faith in God's overall control. Of all the models considered in this thesis, this view of providence maintains the strongest sense of God's transcendent control over the details of life and, therefore, the strongest sense that *all* of life *contributes* to the divine purpose.

### ***AN OVERVIEW OF HELM'S THEOLOGICAL AGENDA AND METHOD***

Paul Helm has recently constructed something of an apology for this 'risk free' model of providence. As a Reformed theologian and philosopher of religion, Helm's sympathy lies with an Augustinian view of God's creative and providential relationship to the world.<sup>478</sup> Helm adopts 'the "no-risk" view of divine providence . . . because it best accords with the classical view of divine providence.'<sup>479</sup> Helm's model clearly reflects this association with a classical view of Christian theism, and it also reflects his acceptance and philosophical defence of the classical attributes of absolute perfection ascribed to God, such as omniscience, omnipotence, immutability, goodness and love.<sup>480</sup> Maintaining the consistency of these attributes with each other, and with those biblical references to God which seem to contradict some of them, forms a key hermeneutical constraint in the formulation of Helm's concept of providence.

Developing his doctrine of providence from a Reformed perspective, Helm seeks to maintain a strong emphasis on God's sovereign control over the created order. Only thus can God be thought able to achieve infallibly his purposes--'in so far as theism requires a belief in divine providence the [concept of the] indeterminacy of the future . . . is inconsistent with it.'<sup>481</sup> This requires, in Helm's

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<sup>477</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 223-224.

<sup>478</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 22-23; cf. *ibid.*, 129.

<sup>479</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 177. Philip Clayton designates this traditional understanding of God and of God's providential relation to the world as 'classical philosophical theism' ('The Case for Christian Panentheism,' *Dialog* 37, no. 3 (Summer 1998): 202.

<sup>480</sup>Helm, *Eternal God*, 15-16, 39, 161, 185.

<sup>481</sup>Helm, *Eternal God*, 124.

view, that God timelessly determine the whole of creation, both what is for us its *eventual* outcome, as well as the means used to achieve that outcome. Helm defines providence as ‘the all-embracing rule of the one God’<sup>482</sup> This focus naturally leads to a great deal of attention being given to the problem of how divine and human activity are related.

In order to understand Helm’s doctrine of providence one must pay attention to his sources and how he uses them.

### **The Source of Helm’s Doctrine of Providence**

Although he works primarily as a philosopher of religion, Helm uses his philosophy in the service of his conservative Reformed theology. This means that the ‘data’ of his doctrine of providence is provided by the ‘divine revelation’ embodied in scripture. This does not mean that a doctrine of providence is explicitly spelled out in scripture. Rather, one must ‘draw together’ the scattered accounts of ‘the activity of God in the individual lives of men and women,’ as recorded throughout the Bible, ‘into a balanced and consistent whole’ or model. Reason is applied through a combination of deduction, induction and abduction until the model has been constructed which best accounts for all the data.<sup>483</sup>

The ‘data’ derived from scripture not only becomes the central source of material for constructing a model of providence, but also serves as the criterion against which any such model must be judged for adequacy.<sup>484</sup> As well as constituting the material source for a doctrine of providence, scripture also retains authority to arbitrate in areas that cannot be resolved on logical grounds alone.<sup>485</sup> For example, although Helm thinks William James’ analogy of the master chess player is an ‘ingenious’ way of picturing providence, especially as it accounts for human free-will and the contingency of events, he is forced to reject it because

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<sup>482</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 157, 219; cf. *ibid.*, 139, 220.

<sup>483</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 27-28, 30.

<sup>484</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 164.

<sup>485</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 140.

‘Scripture teaches *particular* providence, that not only the ends are ordained by God but also the means to those ends.’<sup>486</sup>

As do all theologians who mine the data of scripture for clues about providence, Helm has to make a hermeneutical decision about how to correlate scripture’s seemingly conflicting images of God’s relation to the world. Helm holds to the Reformation principle of the unity of scripture--‘Scripture is self-consistent.’<sup>487</sup> In his doctrine of God and providence, therefore, he maintains that unity by means of a hermeneutic of ‘priority’--privileging the references to God which speak of his ‘essential properties’ over those that are anthropomorphic accommodations.<sup>488</sup>

Helm notes correctly that one’s choice of a hermeneutic of scripture directly affects one’s view of the God-world relation. In his opinion, it forces one to adopt either a *free-will* view of this relation (when priority is given to anthropomorphic language), or a *determinist* understanding (when priority is given to the ‘exact’ language describing God’s ‘essential properties’).<sup>489</sup> Of course, in choosing to give hermeneutical priority to the ‘exact’ language,<sup>490</sup> Helm has decided which is the exact language and which is the language of accommodation. He explains his rationale as follows: the apparent conflict between the biblical data which, ‘on the one hand, stress God’s omniscience and the power of his grace, and on the other portray him as changing his mind, and men and women resisting his grace,’ requires one to make a ‘stark’ choice between which type of language should receive hermeneutical priority. Although one might ask whether the choice is quite as ‘stark’

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<sup>486</sup>Helm, Providence, 139.

<sup>487</sup>Helm, Providence, 28.

<sup>488</sup>Helm, Providence, 51-54.

<sup>489</sup>Helm, Providence, 53-54. Helm is quite correct in pointing out the criterial role played in a doctrine of providence by one’s hermeneutic of scripture. While it is important to note his methodological strategy, I will not engage Helm extensively on this matter, since I am working primarily with these models of providence as wholes. Like the divine action issue noted in Chapter One, the hermeneutical question constitutes another whole field of subsidiary inquiry beyond the scope of this thesis. Helm himself, for example, in the interests of his systematic focus, has chosen to leave aside certain historical, scientific and hermeneutical questions with respect to the biblical account of the fall, concentrating instead on ‘the overall character of God’s providential rule over his universe’ (Providence, 97).

<sup>490</sup>Helm, Providence, 52.

as Helm claims, he nevertheless says the conclusion ‘seems obvious’ to him, that is, ‘the statements about the extent and intensity of God’s knowledge, power and goodness must control the anthropomorphic and weaker statements, and not vice versa.’ To choose otherwise would result in God being reduced to ‘human proportions.’<sup>491</sup>

Helm is seeking to provide a ‘metaphysical underpinning’ for his understanding of the biblical view of God, one which will allow for ‘an unattenuated Christian theism’ in which ‘God creates, judges, delivers, and redeems; he speaks, sustains, predicts, and assures.’<sup>492</sup> To achieve this, he reasons as follows: ‘Supposing that all such scriptural assertions about God are, when properly interpreted, true, or that they are *prima facie* true, the question arises as to how, from a *conceptual* and *metaphysical* point of view, they can all be true together.’<sup>493</sup> By proposing a ‘metaphysical underpinning,’ he hopes to avoid treating ‘timelessness’ ‘*in vacuo*’ from other properties of God,<sup>494</sup> thus allowing him to use such abstract metaphysical concepts as immutability and omniscience without having to argue for or against whether such concepts owe their origin to Greek thought. He develops a transcendental argument to support his methodological decision: ‘Even if it is granted that the idea of timelessness is pure Greek invention[,] what matters is whether the thought that God is timeless is a necessary truth-condition of all else that Christians want to say of God, which is certainly not a Greek invention.’<sup>495</sup> If one accepts that divine timeless eternity and immutability are concepts both consistent with, and required by, the concept of God held by biblical writers, and if one further grants that these characteristics of God ought to control one’s understanding of God’s relation to the world, what do these criteria entail for a doctrine of providence?

Helm answers this question in the context of dealing with two major problems for Christian theism: the problem of epistemic access (which includes

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<sup>491</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 51-52.

<sup>492</sup>Helm, *Eternal God*, 21, 23.

<sup>493</sup>Helm, *Eternal God*, 21 (italics mine).

<sup>494</sup>Helm, *Eternal God*, 21.

<sup>495</sup>Helm, *Eternal God*, 22; cf. *ibid.*, 21-22, 3-4, 11.



problems for belief and faith),<sup>496</sup> and the theodicy question: “How can there be evil in a universe which God controls?”<sup>497</sup> I will briefly refer to his treatment of the theodicy problem, below, under the heading, ‘A Framework for Meaning.’ First, however, Helm deals with the epistemic access problem by working out a model of the God-world relation.

## The God-World Relation

Helm recognises the impossibility of humans grasping the nature of the ‘*sui generis*’ relation of God to the world.<sup>498</sup> This restriction on epistemic access leaves one with few options: one can abandon the attempt to understand the relation; appeal to unresolvable paradox; or offer an explanatory theory ‘of this unique relationship and so make it intelligible.’ Helm rejects all these strategies, and appeals instead to the strategy of creating a *model* of the God-world relation which pictures the ‘relationship between God and his responsible creatures which Scripture sets forth.’<sup>499</sup> Use of a model of the God-world relation allows Helm to stress both certain key affirmations about God’s relation to the world and remain apophatic about less well understood aspects of that relation. In other words, the use of a model gives him access to the ‘is’ and ‘is not’ feature of metaphors and to the ‘staying power’ of models in their role as root metaphors. It is the character of Helm’s particular model itself which determines what one can know, or not know, about God’s providential care.<sup>500</sup>

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<sup>496</sup>Helm develops a doctrine of providence with three contexts in mind: ‘the interests of the individual Christian, . . . the interests of all Christians--the Christian church--and . . . the interests of the whole of creation’ (*Providence*, 21).

<sup>497</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 25.

<sup>498</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 163, 62.

<sup>499</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 164.

<sup>500</sup>This will be demonstrated below in discussion of the distinction between God’s hidden and God’s revealed will.

Helm's primary criterion for such models is doing 'justice to the biblical data.' This is not a straightforward criterion,<sup>501</sup> as Helm himself has shown in his development and use of a theological hermeneutics of 'priority.' It involves deeper conceptual issues, as well as hermeneutical concerns. David Kelsey's insight that a theological system functions as 'an aesthetic entity' which, 'unlike an argument, doesn't logically "begin" at any one point.'<sup>502</sup> may help to account for the apparent circularity in Helm's model: on the one hand, the kind of criteria he finds in scripture in support of his model *results from* a biblical-theological hermeneutics of 'priority' as required by the *model* itself; on the other hand, he feels *scripture requires* his particular theological model. A model of providence, therefore, not only *assumes* a particular view of the God-world relation, but justifies it by *articulating* that perspective in as clear a manner as possible.<sup>503</sup>

As noted earlier, Helm's theology of providence assumes the benefit (necessity) of maintaining an 'unattenuated theism,' which includes such attributes of divine perfection as timeless eternity, immutability and absolute "fore"-knowledge--God, being timeless, does not know anything *in advance*, rather, 'God knows, and that is all.'<sup>504</sup> The primary reason for defending the idea of God as timelessly eternal and immutable 'can be found in the need to draw a proper distinction between the creator and creature.'<sup>505</sup>

Helm bases his argument for God being timelessly eternal upon the 'exact' language about God in scripture, which in turn seems to require that God be necessarily immutable. He defines 'timelessness' as 'time-freeness, . . . in which nothing time-free is simultaneous in any sense with anything which occurs in time.'<sup>506</sup> Thus, 'God's eternal existence has no temporal relations whatever to any

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<sup>501</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 183. For Helm's criteria for a model of 'the divine-human relationship,' see *ibid.*, 164-165.

<sup>502</sup>Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (London, UK: SCM Press, 1975), 137.

<sup>503</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 164-191.

<sup>504</sup>Helm, *Eternal God*, 37.

<sup>505</sup>Helm, *Eternal God*, 17, 20.

<sup>506</sup>Helm, *Eternal God*, 32.

particular thing which he creates.' This does not mean he has no relations with creation, for he has the relation of knowledge, but it is a 'time-free' knowledge.<sup>507</sup>

From the forgoing synopsis, it is evident that Helm means to preserve the traditional distinction between Creator and creature. At the same time, however, he insists that God is intimately involved in all that goes on in the world: whether in an individual's life, in the church, or in the world in general. In Helm's judgement, this involvement can only be total if God is both self-sufficiently separate from creation as its sole source of being and, at the same time, in total and 'direct control' of every aspect of that created reality.<sup>508</sup> In spite of his claim to the contrary, does this 'direct control' constitute a truly personal involvement by God, or only a uni-directional, necessary and sufficient causation? The latter type of relation is clearly implied, for example, in his understanding of grace: it is 'causally sufficient for . . . [the purpose of] making a person a Christian.'<sup>509</sup>

Helm tries to strike a balance between the divine transcendence and immanence, but his depiction seems to privilege the transcendent aspect over the immanent, the omni-causal over the interactive, and the impersonal over the personal. For example, God *communicates* with humans on a personal level, that is, in the modes by which they are able to receive information. However, if the mutual capacity to influence the thoughts, feelings, desires and will of the other is part of what it means to be in a personal relation, then this metaphysical model seems to lack an important element in its definition of the personal God-human relation--that is, humans do not have *real*, but only apparent, conversations with God, since prayer never changes God's mind. It would seem that the *otherness* of humans must be restricted to mean *recipients* only, not true communicators.

Vincent Brümmer argues that for a relation to be truly personal it cannot involve one person manipulating the other. Helm replies by suggesting that, in fact, we do experience *personal* relations that are manipulative, constraining or coercive,

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<sup>507</sup>Helm, *Eternal God*, 36-37; cf. *ibid.*, 15-16, 27, 39, 161, 185, 170.

<sup>508</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 20, 22.

<sup>509</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 50.

such as ‘between a parent and a child.’<sup>510</sup> He concludes (‘tentatively’) that two conditions are ‘sufficient for a personal relation’: ‘that relationship is exercised through the structure of belief and desire of each, and ...that exercise does not rely upon physical coercion or psychological compulsion.’<sup>511</sup> One can discern here Helm’s compatibilist presuppositions shaping this definition. It is probably worth noting that the difference of opinion between Brümmer and Helm on this issue (noted by Helm) is largely rooted in their opposite views of human freedom--Helm’s model understands freedom as volitional, while Brümmer has a libertarian view of freedom. Brümmer argues, ‘given that the choice of an agent is a *necessary* condition for his or her act, one person can never be the *complete* cause of the act of another person.’ ‘For the realization of a *personal relationship* the initiative of *both* partners in the relationship is necessary,’ which entails both have ‘the freedom of will . . . to say “no” to the other.’<sup>512</sup> Even Helm has to admit that in his own view ‘the boundaries between such coercion and compulsion (on the one hand) and acceptable interpersonal constraint (on the other) are unclear and controversial.’<sup>513</sup> This is especially problematic when one remembers that in light of God’s full control of all actions and structures ‘of belief and desire,’ the distinction between physical and mental mediums of control is inconsequential.

What do these general characteristics of the God-world relation imply for Helm’s doctrine of providence?

### ***DIVINE PROVIDENTIAL CONTROL AND MEANING IN HISTORY***

Helm encapsulates his model as consisting of ‘a “risk-free” view of divine providence, and the compatibilist view of human freedom and determinism.’<sup>514</sup> In the context of this theological determinism,<sup>515</sup> Helm develops a model of providence which

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<sup>510</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 150, 148-153.

<sup>511</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 152.

<sup>512</sup>Brümmer, *Speaking of a Personal God: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 74, 75.

<sup>513</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 152.

<sup>514</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 67.

<sup>515</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 174-177.

serves two functions: first, as an explanation of the biblical view of God's relation to three contexts--individual Christian, church, and universe; and second, as a necessary structure of meaning for the contemporary experience of life. Since the second function implies the first, primary attention will be given to this meaning-making role.

### A Framework for Meaning

Helm defends the more traditional and Reformed account of providence as encompassing God's preservation, sustenance, and government of the affairs of the world.<sup>516</sup> These aspects of providence might be termed 'levels,' in distinction from the three 'contexts' noted earlier. Presumably all three levels of providence are exercised in each of the contexts. It should be pointed out, however, that he does not make a sharp distinction between God's creative and providential relations to creation. As noted above, the creation of the world as a *whole* is God's unitary act. Every detail of created life has been 'timelessly' decreed as an *aspect* of that single whole.<sup>517</sup> The concepts of preservation, sustenance and governance must be understood in that light, and not as if there was an *initial* creative work, *after which* God then upholds and governs the finished product already in existence. This would imply a temporal sequence in God's creative act of the whole, which Helm disallows. Therefore, while one can speak of the preserving aspect of providence, it seems that Helm would understand this as a logical distinction rather than a temporal or real one. Just as, in relation to God's knowledge of temporal events, 'God knows, and that is all,'<sup>518</sup> so Helm might say, 'God creates/preserves, and that is all.' It is a reflection of the limitations of a temporal perspective which requires humans to use tensed language when referring to a timeless decree.

For the same reason, the concept of providence itself is something of a *logical* distinction from the idea of the single act of creation, in spite of the fact that Helm confusingly continues to speak of God acting within the space-time matrix as if God were acting *in* time--exemplified, for example, in the change of God's relation

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<sup>516</sup>Helm, Providence, 21-23.

<sup>517</sup>Helm, Providence, 22.

<sup>518</sup>Helm, Eternal God, 37.

to creation *after* the fall, seen in his ‘withdrawing his goodness’ from it.<sup>519</sup> It would seem that what is timeless and immutable about God’s relation to creation is his relation to it as a *whole*. However, this ‘whole’ includes the many sub-acts (as means to ends) which constitute the space-time matrix as such. Thus, it only *appears* (to humans) that God acts sequentially from within time. This view seems to imply that since the creation as a whole does not exist *in* time, but rather has space and time as constitutive properties of its character, it exists (as a whole) timelessly. Two important concerns suggest themselves here: first, is one to conclude that creation as such exists as an eternal idea in the mind of God; second, would this entail that creation (like God) is timelessly eternal (and so immutable), and if so, what might this mean for a doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*? Moreover, in this view, providence seems to minimise the dynamic aspect of God’s care, although in Helm’s no-risk model the *immutability* of the decree is a necessary description of the way in which providence provides a context of meaning for human life.

The character of this *logical* distinction between the several aspects of providence is reflected in Helm’s revised version of double agency. In his concern to maintain God’s full control over creation, Helm objects to the classical idea of double agency in accounting for *both* divine control *and* human freedom. He maintains that it is not enough to say God (as the primary causal power) provides only the ‘*necessary* conditions’ for a human action, while the human agent supplies the *sufficient* element (secondary cause) for the action, for this would compromise God’s control. In order to ensure a particular creaturely action takes place, the divine conditions have to be both ‘*necessary and sufficient*.’ In any case, having two sets of necessary and sufficient conditions (divine and human) would be incoherent.<sup>520</sup> This is another way of stating Helm’s metaphysical principle that God not only determines the end, but also the means to the end.<sup>521</sup> In the context of this theological determinism

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<sup>519</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 91.

<sup>520</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 181, 182.

<sup>521</sup>Helm, *Eternal God*, 70; cf. *idem*, *Providence*, 219.



Helm defines how his model of providence contributes to a sense of meaning in the human experience of life.

Helm is well aware that his model of providence evokes the charge of logical determinism. He deals with this criticism in the context of arguing for a clear distinction between God's will as 'decree' and his will as 'command,' between God's secret will and his revealed will.<sup>522</sup> Helm calls this a crucial distinction because in the 'no-risk' model of providence, God is in complete control of every occurrence. In order to account for *both* divine control *and* human responsibility and the existence of evil, there must be a distinction between the two wills of God. This demarcation will determine the kind of meaning one finds in life.

This distinction between the two wills of God is necessary if compatibilism is to be credible. But the same criticism applies to both compatibilism and the "two" wills concept (as used in this model): if God is really in total control of even what I will freely choose, is there then any *practical* distinction between God's will and my act? Helm tries to defend the credibility of such a distinction by illustrating it as follows:

My cherry tree exists by God's decree, but God has not commanded that the tree exist. (We might say that he has commanded that the tree exist, but not that he has commanded the tree *to* exist.) After all, it is possible to issue commands only to what already exists, and until God has commanded that the tree exist there is no tree for him to issue commands to.<sup>523</sup>

If, however, God has decreed *that* the cherry tree exists, because this is a unitary timeless decretal act, the decree must *include* the trillions of decretal elements which ensure that it exist *in this way*, and if so, does not this complex all-inclusive decree also amount to a *command to exist in this way*?

Nevertheless, in Helm's view, God's *decree* is the hidden or secret aspect of providence. Its effect appears in any given moment in the form of what *is*, but humans have little access as to *why* God's secret will has brought about *this* state of affairs. Helm also notes that while one can affirm *that* God exercises a relation to

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<sup>522</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 47, 131, 132.

<sup>523</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 47.

creation of providential control (his decree or plan), one cannot claim ‘an intimate knowledge of the future course of God’s providential purposes.’<sup>524</sup> Aside from glimpses given through special revelation, one can only know something of the shape of God’s decretal will by observing what in fact comes to pass.<sup>525</sup> What a knowledge of the *fact* of the decree does provide, however, is a sense of absolute security which is necessary in order to free humans to *live*.<sup>526</sup> One might say that if the Judeo-Christian God were not a part of the equation of one’s experience of the world, then he or she could dispense with all talk of providence. But as long as one retains belief in this creator God (the ultimate source of *this* world), then one seems to need some account of this present state of affairs in order to find the courage to continue seeking a meaningful existence. For this reason humans need a strong doctrine of providence; they need to know *that* God is in control of every aspect of existence. Helm insists that revelation provides this knowledge and therefore it becomes the authoritative basis of a doctrine of providence and of the confidence which derives from that doctrine. But he cautions that it is a mistake to think one can use this knowledge of the *fact* of providence, and the security it brings, either to help God achieve his plan or to tamper with it. In fact, Helm argues that the providential plan, in order to be *God’s* plan, *requires* our ignorance of its details.<sup>527</sup> If we had insight into the *how* and *what* of the plan, we would find ourselves either resisting uncomfortable aspects of it, or feeling it necessary to bend our wills to comply with it. This latter response would amount to a kind of psychological coercion, *thus negating our volitional freedom*.<sup>528</sup> In other words, humans have to act *as if* they were libertarianly free (although Helm does not say this explicitly<sup>529</sup>). Otherwise they end up trying to “help” God’s providential plan along. But since God alone is

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<sup>524</sup>Helm, Providence, 228-229.

<sup>525</sup>Helm, Providence, 141.

<sup>526</sup>Helm, Providence, 141, 228; 136-137, 229.

<sup>527</sup>Helm, Providence, 229, 230.

<sup>528</sup>Helm, Providence, 141, 188.

<sup>529</sup>Cf. Helm, Providence, 232-233; and idem, ‘Response to Critics,’ in God and Time: Four Views, ed. Gregory E. Ganssle (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 79-81.

orchestrating that plan, it *requires* that humans know nothing about it, at least that they not know about it to the extent of trying to advance its fulfilment by means of that knowledge.

At this point one might ask, is Helm correct to say the less one knows of God's providential plan the better?<sup>530</sup> Jim Petty, who also uses a Calvinist model of providence, suggests that human knowledge of God's decretal will would actually be 'toxic' to our faith, 'the information would damage us.' For example, 'knowing with the certainty of God's knowledge that we would be saved no matter what we did or believed would corrupt us beyond recognition as Christians.'<sup>531</sup> One wonders, however, why this would have to be so, if in fact Christ's 'death on the cross *changed our fearful and arrogant hearts* so that we are able to be joyful creatures and not frustrated gods.'<sup>532</sup> If God is fully in control of human response to his grace, *could* knowledge of his decretal will actually effect an unordained corruption of one's heart?

The idea of the *necessary* hiddenness of God's decree seems to run counter to the rationale of Helm's whole project. If God has decreed both the ends and the means to those ends, and if *whatever* one knows or does not know is controlled by God and will serve as part of those means, would not the net result be the same whether one knew little or much? Again, why should he bother to clarify *that* God has a providential plan, if we are to remain in ignorance about *how* God is carrying it out? Helm might reply by saying that knowing *everything* is timelessly decreed sets one free to exercise and seek to enhance one's desire for God (which is decreed *and* commanded),<sup>533</sup> that *this* amount of knowledge at least is what God has revealed, and is therefore intended to form a part of the *means* of fulfilling his decree. The relationship between one's *knowledge* of the *fact* of the providential decree, and the *role* of that knowledge in forming part of the ordained means of fulfilling that decree,

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<sup>530</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 228-230.

<sup>531</sup>Jim Petty, 'Guidance and the Plan of God,' *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 17, no. 3 (Spring 1999): 41; cf. *ibid.*, 42-43.

<sup>532</sup>Petty, 'Guidance,' 43 (italics mine).

<sup>533</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 137.

is similar to the relationship between prayer and the fulfilment of God's plan.

Although God has timelessly ensured who will pray, and what and when they pray, those prayers are nevertheless effective secondary causes integral to God's unitary act of creation, which includes the outworking of his providential plan.<sup>534</sup>

The concept of the kind of knowledge God *has* made available regarding his providential design introduces the concept of God's revealed will or his *commands*. Helm says our knowledge of God's providential will is, for the most part, limited to the general character of how God wants us to live, as revealed in his commands.<sup>535</sup> This is similar to the view adopted by Jim Petty who argues that God has purposely only given us access to 'the hidden mystery of how God would redeem the fallen world . . . . [a] truth [which] focuses our energy on present obedience and service.'<sup>536</sup> The intention of these commands is to lead us to conformity to Christ,<sup>537</sup> but it does not extend to revealing *what* God's larger plan is, nor *how* he is achieving it. Those who co-operate with God by obeying his commands are actually privileged to become willing co-workers in the fulfilling of God's providential plan--of course, even this co-operation has been brought about by God's initiative and control. It is through his commands that God guides us, not through a knowledge of his overall plan (decree).<sup>538</sup> Even when a human disobeys God's commands, God nevertheless works *through* this disobedience to achieve his eternal plan. Thus, God's revealed will (as commands, obeyed or disobeyed) actually becomes part of the *means* to achieving his hidden decree.

The way Helm has explained the issue of the "two wills" of God defines how his model of providence enables one to find meaning in the ambiguous experiences of life. One can summarise here by noting first, that a sense of significance and meaning derives from knowledge of the fact that *all* creaturely acts contribute to God's eternal plan. Second, confidence and security in the present, and hope for the

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<sup>534</sup>Cf. Helm, *Providence*, 146, 154, 157.

<sup>535</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 232-233; cf. *ibid.*, 131-135.

<sup>536</sup>Petty, 'Guidance,' 43.

<sup>537</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 115-116.

<sup>538</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 133, 134.

future derive from the knowledge that ‘providence governs everything’ and that ‘for Christians no event can be ultimately tragic.’ Finally, knowledge of such a model of providence, when combined with one’s past experience of God’s providential care, serves as an ‘interpretative framework’ by which to evaluate the further experiences of life. This knowledge frees one to respond to those experiences according to God’s commands.<sup>539</sup> By its very comprehensiveness, ‘the Christian idea of providence may be said to give us the rudiments of a philosophy of history.’<sup>540</sup>

The framework of meaning just outlined raises a potentially devastating moral dilemma for this model of providence. It stems from an apparent contradiction: If ‘God controls all events and yet issues moral commands which are disobeyed in some of the very events which he controls,’<sup>541</sup> then how can God be good and humans held responsible for their evil actions.<sup>542</sup> Helm readily admits that the most difficult problem for a no-risk view of providence is the charge that it makes God the direct author of sin ‘in such a way as to compromise his righteousness.’<sup>543</sup> As noted in the previous chapter, Wiles levelled the charge of immorality against the classical (Augustinian) view of election and providence. If the God-world relation in this doctrine of providence is to have a *positive* meaning, an attempt must be made to ameliorate this problem.

Helm counters this ‘not entirely welcome result’ of compatibilism by charging the ‘indeterministic scheme’ with problems of an equally serious nature. If the compatibilist view ‘has the disadvantage of directly implicating God in human evil, since God ordains sets of circumstances which are causally sufficient for evil actions by human beings,’ then equally the ‘indeterministic alternative’ has God foreknowing evil and doing ‘nothing to prevent it.’ Helm concludes that ‘it is certainly not obvious that someone who does something knowing that evil will result

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<sup>539</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 219, 220-221; 218, 230, 141, 228, 223, 230.

<sup>540</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 118.

<sup>541</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 133; cf. *ibid.*, 230.

<sup>542</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 162-163.

<sup>543</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 183.

while not intending the evil is free from responsibility. So an indeterministic scheme no more frees God from all responsibility than does a deterministic scheme,' especially since God could intervene but does not.<sup>544</sup> Helm thus concludes that in either view of God's relation to the world as the ultimate source of the world's existence, God must take ultimate responsibility for evil. However, in neither the risk nor risk-free model does God *intend* evil; therefore he cannot be thought 'morally culpable' for that evil.<sup>545</sup>

Helm's soft determinist view of the God-world relation leads him to adopt the 'greater good' defence for the question of the existence of evil.<sup>546</sup> He admits the impossibility of accounting for why God decreed moral evil, but he does think we have some clues, one of the more important being the revelation of God's 'mercy and grace' and of 'God's own character.'<sup>547</sup> While God could have created humans such that they always freely did the morally right thing,<sup>548</sup> he did not because he knew that 'without the occurrence of moral evil certain other goods could not, logically speaking, arise. Without weakness and need, no compassion; without fault, no forgiveness, and so on.'<sup>549</sup> Evil, therefore, is not simply an unfortunate result of making possible the development of moral human beings, but is a 'logically necessary' element in that creative/providential goal. In this way the Christian God decrees evil as an essential component in the providential meaning of human life.

In Helm's view, his hermeneutic of scripture requires him to understand God as immutable and timelessly eternal. This view of God further entails theological determinism, philosophical compatibilism, and a model of providence as expressing absolute divine control of all creation. This model of providence defines the

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<sup>544</sup>Helm, Eternal God, 159, 164.

<sup>545</sup>Helm, Eternal God, 164; cf. idem, Providence, 176, 177.

<sup>546</sup>Helm, Providence, 213-215; cf. *ibid.*, 197-215.

<sup>547</sup>Helm, Providence, 195, 215.

<sup>548</sup>Helm, Providence, 200, 197, 163; idem, Eternal God, 156.

<sup>549</sup>Helm, Providence, 213; cf. *ibid.*, 214.



meaning of all of human life and action as serving God's inexorable providential purpose.<sup>550</sup>

In developing this model of providence and the way it ensures meaning for life, Helm has remained largely silent on the most distinctive aspect of the Christian God: God as a Triune. This leads one to ask, what, if anything, does Helm's view of providence and meaning have to do with the Trinity as such?

### One-Dimensional Providence and a Trinitarian God

Although the personal God of the Bible (at least of the New Testament) is Triune, Helm's understanding of the way the meaning of human life and actions is achieved does not seem to require a trinitarian God. That God is *Trinity*, in this model, is simply a fact of revelation. In ruling the world, the actions of the trinitarian Persons remain undifferentiated, that is, there is no discernible distinction between Father, Son and Spirit which might contribute to a nuancing of God's providential control of history. The fact that Helm insists on the personal relation of God to the world, and that this God includes the person Jesus Christ, would seem at least to raise the question of what this might mean for God's providence.

Helm might respond to this question by arguing that if one is mainly concerned with the issue of divine control, then whether God is three or one makes little difference. In response, one could argue that, while it is not logically incoherent to claim that in achieving the divine providential plan it makes no material difference if God is three or one, one might ask whether such a model does justice to the biblical representation of God as present to and in the world in the differentiated forms of Father, Son and Holy Spirit? Even in Helm's model of providence, although the world effects no change in God, yet God's self-revelation to the world, and the change that revelation effects in the way humans respond to God's will as command, is part of God's overall purpose for creation. Moreover, God's command for humans is primarily to be conformed to his Son through the Spirit's enabling power.<sup>551</sup> So even Helm's emphasis on risk-free providence involves

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<sup>550</sup>Cf. Helm, Providence, 118-221.

<sup>551</sup>Although Helm makes many references to God and Jesus Christ in The Providence of God, as far as I can discover he makes no reference to the Spirit. While he pictures Christ as instrumental

something more than mere control, mainly because of the distinct roles played in the shaping of human character and history by the involvement of the Son and Spirit in the world. The providential *control* God exercises serves a specific purpose--*conformity* to the Son--and is achieved (presumably) through the roles played by the trinitarian Persons in the economy, each in a way unique to their identity.

Helm's view of God's providential relation to creation, and to human history in particular, seems to result in a uni-directional relation between God and the world, in a one-dimensional God and a one-dimensional providence: the Father moves the world according to his plan, and the world is moved. In Helm's words, 'providence is the all-embracing rule of the one God' such that, even when a human carries out his or her actions, they are 'contributing to the total of the causal order called divine providence.'<sup>552</sup>

Perhaps the closest Helm comes to giving providence a trinitarian shape is in his differentiation between two levels of providence, each manifesting a particular type of God's wisdom and power. The first is 'the power that upholds the physical forces of the universe,' which in turn 'provides the setting, the necessary conditions for the exercise of this other [second] sort of power.' The second type of providential power is manifested in the death of Christ. It is 'a different *kind* of power and wisdom,' although 'still effective in bringing about certain ends,' namely, 'the creation of the church and her preservation in time, and . . . her ultimate glorification.'<sup>553</sup> Helm continues to think in terms of causation and control. Although he clearly understands Christ to be 'the eternal Son of God,' he does not explore this trinitarian connection to see how it might nuance the causally effective relation of God to the world, except to note that 'the humbling and death of Christ is

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in God's providence, no account is given of the Spirit's role, either as one of the trinitarian persons, or as having an individual role in the providential economy. What the Father plans and effects seems to be done by the Father directly. However, given his general theological position, it seems safe to assume that he holds a traditional view of the Spirit's person and role in the economy.

<sup>552</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 219.

<sup>553</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 226, 227.

part of that divine providential order.<sup>554</sup> God's providential 'offering up of the eternal Son of God' shows us something about the nature of both God's power and purposes, that is, as 'the *telos* of God's providential rule' carrying us towards 'ultimate reconciliation and righteousness in God's kingdom.' Helm refers to this '*telos*' as God's 'chief purpose.'<sup>555</sup> Thus, he apparently sees Christ as carrying out the Father's providential and redemptive purpose, but does not emphasise the role of Christ in giving shape to the relation of *God* to the world. Christ *manifests* the presence and character of God's providential purpose and power (Christ is 'the divine provision for others'<sup>556</sup>), but does not *define* them. Thus Helm's doctrine of providence gives primary place to God as Father.

### **INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF THE 'NO-RISK' MODEL**

Helm's classical treatment of the God-world relation stresses the transcendence, sovereignty, glory and timeless purposes of God<sup>557</sup> over the importance of human freedom and human understanding. If he has not succeeded in fully deflecting McFague's charge of autocratic control and patronising benevolence, he may at least have muted the charge of fatalism--because of the real efficacy of secondary causes and because the controlling factor in life is not impersonal physical forces but the personal God of the Bible.<sup>558</sup> Nevertheless, while God creates and governs out of love, God does not share those roles with anyone.

Even though Helm refers to Christ as a model and means of God's providence, his primary emphasis is either on the Father or on the one godhead. Focusing on God in this way means Helm's treatment of the divine attributes refers to the attributes of the *one essence* of the godhead, rather than understanding the attributes as qualities of the perichoretically constituted identity of the *persons* of the Trinity. These inferred attributes of the single *essence* of the Trinity's *shared* nature

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<sup>554</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 228, 227.

<sup>555</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 228, 226.

<sup>556</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 110.

<sup>557</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 215, 23.

<sup>558</sup>Cf. Helm, *Providence*, 118, 138, 140, 141, 219, 220.

enables Helm to give central place to the timelessly held divine attributes of immutability, omniscience and omnipotence. From this perspective, Helm can then develop his doctrine of providence as the carrying out of timelessly immutable decrees and commands. Given this context, one can understand the rationale behind Helm's statement to the effect that there is no need to make an explicit connection between a doctrine of the Trinity and a doctrine of providence.<sup>559</sup> Although in disagreement on many other issues, Helm and Richard Swinburne agree on this point. In his philosophical treatment of providence and theodicy, Swinburne expressly states that the Christian understanding of God as Trinity 'makes no difference to the issues' of providence and evil (which includes, for Swinburne, a free-will theodicy), since the trinitarian 'persons always act together.'<sup>560</sup>

Helm is essentially following the Augustinian formula, '*opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*.'<sup>561</sup> It is probably due to this methodological choice, for example, that one fails to find in Helm's theology of providence any mention of the Holy Spirit. Helm thus treats the life of the immanent Trinity (the divine activity *ad intra*) as a single, undifferentiated whole, at least with respect to providence. Perhaps maintaining a sharp distinction between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity is another reason for Helm's lack of integration of Trinity and providence, of the divine life *ad intra* and the divine work *ad extra*.

In a similar way, therefore, Helm treats the work of the one God *ad extra* as a single unit--in keeping with his understanding of creation as a single (timeless) act. Helm's model almost treats creation/providence wholly as an internal act of the Father's will. A criticism Robert Jenson raises against Augustine's 'doctrine of divine simplicity' would seem to apply to Helm's model as well: the traditional view of the divine simplicity makes it difficult to account for 'the complexity of the

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<sup>559</sup>Paul Helm, private conversation with author, Tyndale House, Cambridge, UK, May 1998.

<sup>560</sup>Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1998), 253, n. 1.

<sup>561</sup>Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh, UK: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1991, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1997), 4.

biblical God.<sup>562</sup> Helm himself, for example, rightly points out the necessary interconnection between the doctrines of creation, redemption, and personal guidance, and therefore also the relation of one's view of providence to how one discerns meaning in history.<sup>563</sup>

One might conclude from the intrinsic *interconnectedness* of the doctrine of God as Trinity with the doctrines of creation, providence, soteriology and eschatology, that it would seem to make sense not only to see the work of *salvation* as trinitarian, but *all* of God's work *ad extra* in this light. If the interconnections mentioned above were integrated around the doctrine of the Trinity, especially the Trinity as revealed in the economy, then a greater weight could be given to the 'relational and dynamic'<sup>564</sup> character of the Trinity as expressed in the Trinity's work.

A modification of Helm's model which begins to move in this direction is that of Terrence Tiessen's Middle Knowledge Calvinist model of providence. He describes his model as affirming

the main features of the Calvinist model. God is comprehensively in control in the world, accomplishing purposes that he has determined in eternity. Because his will is always accomplished, it is evident that God's creatures (human and angelic) do not have libertarian freedom. This is a compatibilist model that affirms both meticulous providence and human freedom of a spontaneous or voluntary kind. This model is less certain than the traditional Calvinist model that God is absolutely timeless because of a concern that such a concept may not do justice to God's highly relational personal being. In a significant sense, God is not only determining human history, he is responding to his creatures within it. This divine responsiveness is facilitated by God's possessing knowledge of how creatures would act in particular circumstances (so called 'middle knowledge'). God not only knows the actual future, he has determined that future. But in order to do this, God needed to know how creatures would respond to situations, including

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<sup>562</sup>Jenson, *The Works of God*, vol. 2, *Systematic Theology* (Oxford, UK; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), 35.

<sup>563</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 214, 118.

<sup>564</sup>Tiessen, *Providence and Prayer*, 324.

their response to his own persuasions or actions. God *can* know this because creatures are not libertarianly free and he *must* know this in order to plan how he will act to bring about his purposes. With simple foreknowledge God would know the future but be unable to do anything about it. With “middle knowledge” God is able to plan and then to accomplish his plan without violating the responsible freedom that he has given to his creatures.<sup>565</sup>

Tiessen feels his model ameliorates the lack of sovereign control over creation reflected in the openness models (for example, John Sanders’), while not “fatalistically” determining each event as in the stronger Calvinist views. Tiessen argues that if God ‘completely knows the *actual* future’ based upon ‘the knowledge of his own will’ (as decree), then there seems to be no place for God to respond to ‘creaturely decisions.’ This would entail that ‘any appearance of significance in those human decisions is thoroughly illusory.’<sup>566</sup>

Upon the basis of his complete middle knowledge of all possible futures, God, in the “beginning,” decided which set of circumstances he would actualise, and which he would not. Thus, any evil that occurs is not only determined by God, but also by the circumstances which lead individuals to act in certain ways. God actively chose just those circumstances which would allow the Holocaust, but he divinely permitted this for the greater good it would bring. Here he seems to agree with Helm regarding the ‘greater good’ defence.<sup>567</sup> In my view, this model fails to side-step the “fatalism” Tiessen seeks to avoid because God’s response to free creaturely acts occurs only in the ‘logical moment’ of creative decision. What *actually* comes to pass is still fully determined by God.<sup>568</sup> Tiessen admits that in this model, as in the others, one is faced with the insoluble problem of why a good God, who is all powerful and loving, would see fit to ordain evil which he could have prevented--Tiessen’s model, like Helm’s, does not allow for libertarian freedom.

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<sup>565</sup>Tiessen, Providence and Prayer, 289-290.

<sup>566</sup>Tiessen, Providence and Prayer, 319.

<sup>567</sup>Cf. Tiessen, Providence and Prayer, 330.

<sup>568</sup>Cf. Tiessen, Providence and Prayer, 319-320, 330.



The chief differences between Tiessen's and Helm's models of providence I wish to note are two: first, Tiessen seems to be open to the idea that God might be able to *experience* temporal relations whereas in Helm's model God can only *understand* them; second, Tiessen argues that God knows the future not only because he decreed it, but he decreed that future in the light of his knowledge of all possible worlds (counterfactuals). In this latter difference Tiessen is trying to give a stronger account of God's genuine responsiveness to human action, but without losing God's absolute control. He feels this view of God's "interactive" relation to the world better accounts for the biblical representation of the 'relational and dynamic' character of the Trinity's actions in the world.

In order to achieve his goal of accounting for God's responsiveness to human creatures, Tiessen also seeks to reduce Helm's emphasis on God's absolute timelessness. Tiessen calls the idea of God's timelessness an 'utterly opaque addition' to the biblical portrayal of God's relation to the world.<sup>569</sup> Although reluctant outrightly to reject the notion of divine timelessness, it seems Tiessen *cannot avoid* using tensed language in talking about the 'decision' God makes in the 'logical moment' of creation. This especially seems to be entailed by his concept of God's use of middle knowledge upon which to base his creative act--some extension of thought processes seem to be involved in "*considering*" which world to actualise. This impression is strengthened by Tiessen's insistence that God acts *in* time in carrying out the various phases of creation.<sup>570</sup> Thus, his model seems to require that God has some kind of time, whereas in Helm's model it is slightly easier to conceive of the unitariness of God's creative act since God had nothing to "consider" except his one idea.<sup>571</sup>

Following Millard Erickson, Tiessen argues that since the Bible clearly pictures God as able to enter into spatial reality, it stands to reason that he can enter

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<sup>569</sup>Tiessen, Providence and Prayer, 322.

<sup>570</sup>Tiessen, Providence and Prayer, 322-323.

<sup>571</sup>Although the following discussion will look at several options for resolving the eternity-time question, no attempt is being made to *solve* the problem. Rather, my concern is to demonstrate that there are other options which might prove fruitful for future exploration in developing a trinitarian doctrine of providence.

into temporal relations as well while remaining transcendent to both.<sup>572</sup> In this regard he appeals to the Incarnation as the definitive example of God's involvement in time and space, thus drawing upon the trinitarian shape of salvation as a stand point from which to develop a model for God's providential relation to the world. He notes that

the incarnation gave Jesus the ability to experience emotions in an embodied way, more closely analogous to our own experience of them. But there is no incoherence between the divine and the human natures. I see no reason to assume that passibility was an experience made possible for the incarnate Word only because of that embodiment. We divide the divine and human natures too strongly, if we assert that God felt the pain of the Father's abandonment only in his humanity.<sup>573</sup>

Tiessen's model of the God-world relation gives greater emphasis to the way in which the Trinity has worked in the world--although he does not work this out in any detail. By giving greater hermeneutical priority to the 'relational and dynamic' character of the Trinity's actions *ad extra*, Tiessen questions Helm's requirement of God's timelessness and impassibility. He has also suggested that the human nature of Jesus Christ in some way remained able to influence his divine nature: 'It was precisely as the divine Word who had known the Father's good pleasure from all eternity that the Son then suffered the terrible sense of the loss of that approval as he was made sin for us.'<sup>574</sup> Finally, he pictures the biblical account of God *responding* to human decisions as effecting a real difference in the shape of the world God creates.

The problem with Tiessen's account is that it not only pictures God as *acting* in time, but seems to put God *within* time as well. He notes for example, that to say God 'is somehow timeless, somehow not in time at all, is to court a host of needless

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<sup>572</sup>Tiessen, *Providence and Prayer*, 321-325.

<sup>573</sup>Tiessen, *Providence and Prayer*, 329. That Christ only suffered in his human nature seems to be Helm's view (cf. Helm, *Providence*, 224, 225; and Helm, 'Response to Nicholas Wolterstorff,' in *God and Time: Four Views*, ed. Gregory E. Ganssle (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 217; cf. also Bray, *Doctrine of God*, *Contours of Christian Theology*, ed. Gerald Bray (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 194-195).

<sup>574</sup>Tiessen, *Providence and Prayer*, 329.

perplexities,' and goes so far as to say that 'God's life is of endless (and beginningless) duration; he has always existed and always will.'<sup>575</sup> If God can *experience* time, then this raises the question about God *having* a time. Helm has argued that the idea of eternal duration (everlastingness) is incoherent, since it leads to the idea of God being in time and therefore entails 'the idea of an actual infinite.'<sup>576</sup> It appears that Tiessen avoids the problem of timelessness only by qualifying God's absolute transcendence *over* time such that God is able to act from *within* time or, he may simply be recognising the intractability of the problems entailed in picturing a timeless God effecting temporal acts, and thus refuses to engage the debate at this level.<sup>577</sup>

Chapter One recorded that one of the reasons for the concept of providence falling into disfavour was a question about its intelligibility--at least as traditionally understood. It would appear that the concept of divine timelessness associated with that classic view of providence is so difficult to understand, and is used to support such a highly deterministic view of providence, that in order to retain belief in the traditional view, one would have to discount the problem of intelligibility. In other words, does the concept of divine timelessness confine discussion of the nature, coherence and plausibility of a doctrine of providence too much to the sphere of abstract philosophical speculation?

Two further questions seem to be in order here. First, since Helm places central importance on God's actions as revealed in the Bible as the final criterion for a doctrine of providence, is it unreasonable to ask whether divine timelessness (with its consequences for providence) is the only conclusion one can draw from that data? Moreover, are there ways of conceiving God's relation to time which would both preserve the creator/creature distinction and yet be less counter-intuitive?

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<sup>575</sup>Tiessen, Providence and Prayer, 322.

<sup>576</sup>Helm, Eternal God, 36-39.

<sup>577</sup>Tiessen's view seems to be similar here to that of Alan Padgett ('Eternity as Relative Timelessness,' in God and Time: Four Views, ed. Gregory E. Ganssle [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001], 92-110), a view which, while Nicholas Wolterstorff critiques it as embodying fallacies, is also very similar to Wolterstorff's own view of God as everlasting, and therefore embodying time as 'a feature of God's own life' ('Response to Alan G. Padgett,' in God and Time: Four Views, ed. Gregory E. Ganssle [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001], 122).

Second, Helm himself notes that in talking about a being who is *sui generis* it becomes necessary to insist that human criteria governing such talk include the requirement of the intelligibility of our claims. For example, in explicating the concept of the divine goodness<sup>578</sup> he notes that one must define it in such a way that some correlation exists between a human idea of the good and our understanding of the divine goodness. Can one extend this criterion, and ask if there is sufficient correlation between the idea of divine timelessness and human experience of time and action to warrant its usefulness? While ‘usefulness’ as such is not a final criterion, clearly the idea of an ‘immutable decree’ funding Helm’s doctrine of providence is one of the concepts which has helped to discredit belief in providence.

If this is further rooted in such an abstract concept as divine timeless eternity, is the case for providence aided or hindered? Are there sufficient warrants for retaining this doctrine of timeless eternity? Is Helm’s model the only credible way of retaining a belief in a biblical idea of providence, or are there other ways which might satisfy a concern for God’s sovereignty and glory, but also allow for a model of God’s relation to humans which incorporates the ‘anthropomorphic’ language of the Bible?

Gerald Bray, for example, outlining a traditional Reformed view of God, notes the difficulties timelessness creates for understanding how God relates to the world:

If God is timeless, it will be difficult to establish what his recorded activities within time might mean. For example, how did Jesus manage to be God on earth and the eternal Logos in heaven at the same time? On the other hand, if God is everlasting in a temporal sense, what happens to his omniscience, and what are we to make of biblical statements to the effect that for God a thousand years are like a day, or even a watch of the night (Ps. 90:4).<sup>579</sup>

Bray seeks a resolution of this problem by arguing that our own experience of the present as a ‘notional concept which we use to separate’ past time from future time serves as an analogy of eternity, that is, the present correlates to eternity in that

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<sup>578</sup>Helm, Providence, 167.

<sup>579</sup>Bray, Doctrine of God, 83-84.

both denote ‘the point which time has now reached,’ or the “end” of time. Since ‘the present is the vehicle by which we can [thus] apprehend the eternal,’ we are able to ‘transcend our [temporal] nature in our personal relationship with [God].’ By carrying the analogy further, Bray suggests that God also transcends his timelessly eternal nature (essence) through his personhood, and in this way divine and human persons are able to interact ‘without compromising [the] . . . divine nature.’ Thus, following Calvin, ‘we know God in his persons, and not in his essence.’<sup>580</sup> But Helm’s problem seems to arise precisely because he fails to draw attention to the interactive relations of the divine *persons* to creation, focusing instead on the relation of the timeless *essence* of the godhead to the world. Thus, Helm’s reference to the incarnate second person of the Trinity does not alleviate the problem of a timeless and immutable God’s relation to creation,<sup>581</sup> nor does it diminish the impression that God’s providential relation to the universe is uni-personal, omni-causal and uni-directional.

Terrence Tiessen’s model takes into account more of the interactive character of God’s relation to creation by placing greater emphasis on the Trinity’s ‘relational and dynamic’ character and by rethinking how God might be related to time. Is it possible to extend his argument, and *begin* with speculation about how a timeless God relates to the dynamic unfolding of human history by observing how the trinitarian *persons* have been conceived as relating to the world? While such an approach could be seen as side-stepping an intractable problem, it allows one to take more seriously the actions of the Trinity as recorded in the New Testament. One effect of this methodological shift is that it requires one to limit his or her understanding of the divine nature to what has been revealed in the actions of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the economy.

William Craig, for example, has recently constructed a model of the relation between eternity and time in which he comes to the startling conclusion that ‘the

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<sup>580</sup>Bray, *Doctrine of God*, 84-85.

<sup>581</sup>Cf. Alfred Freddoso’s comment that the same metaphysical problems which arise when discussing the general Creator-creation relation arise in a doctrine of the incarnation with respect to the two natures of Christ (‘The “Openness” of God: A Reply to Hasker,’ *Christian Scholar’s Review* 28, no. 1 (1998): 130).

most plausible construal of divine eternity is that God is timeless without creation and temporal since creation.<sup>582</sup> In reaching this conclusion, Craig defends (with Helm) the idea that a timeless God can also be personal. He contends ‘that God’s being timeless impairs neither God’s noetic structure (His system of beliefs) nor His ability to discharge any intellectual duties He might be thought to have.’ One need not assume ‘that God’s being timeless or temporal is an essential property of God, that either God is necessarily timeless or He is necessarily temporal.’<sup>583</sup> Craig illustrates this contingency in God’s mode of existence by suggesting that

just as my [Craig’s] height is a contingent rather than essential property of mine, so God’s temporal status is plausibly a contingent rather than essential property of His. So apart from highly controversial claims on behalf of divine simplicity or immutability [contra Helm], I see no reason to think that God is either *essentially* temporal or *essentially* timeless.<sup>584</sup>

As long as God ‘freely refrains’ from ‘remembering, anticipating, reflecting’ (although he *could*) he “is” timeless and personal.<sup>585</sup>

Taking his argument a step further, Craig responds to the criticism that, in order ‘to be personal, He [God] must be engaged in relationships with other persons,’ and this would require him to be temporal. Craig offers two rebuttals. First, he questions whether the ‘*capacity*’ for such relationships must be *exercised* in order to be personal; second, he points out that this criticism wrongly assumes such relationships must be with ‘*human* persons.’ Since Christians understand God to be triune, it is possible to conceive of the trinitarian persons as ‘affected, prompted, or responsive to one another in an unchanging and, hence, timeless way.’<sup>586</sup> Referring to the ‘doctrine of *perichoresis*’ in which each of the divine persons ‘is completely transparent to the others, . . . in this perfect interpenetration of divine love and life,

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<sup>582</sup>William L. Craig, Time and Eternity: Exploring God’s Relationship to Time (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001), 241.

<sup>583</sup>Craig, Time and Eternity, 82.

<sup>584</sup>Craig, Time and Eternity, 83.

<sup>585</sup>Craig, Time and Eternity, 83.

<sup>586</sup>Craig, Time and Eternity, 84, 85.



no change need occur, so that God existing alone in the self-sufficiency of His being would, on a relational view of time, be timeless.' Thus 'a timeless, divine person can be a self-conscious, rational individual endowed with freedom of the will and engage in interpersonal relations.'<sup>587</sup>

While none of these examples of eternity/time models answers all the questions nor enjoy universal acceptance, they do serve to illustrate that Helm's is not the only coherent model of God's relation to time. Moreover, some of these other models make a more consistent attempt to follow Helm's criterion of paying attention to the biblical images of God's interactive relation to the world--images which Helm would accept as being trinitarian. If one assumes the New Testament reveals God as *Trinity* acting in the world, can one in turn derive from that account a trinitarian picture of God's creative/providential relation to the world? In contemplating such an approach in developing a doctrine of providence one would begin, not with the divine *essence* defined in unitary terms, but with the revealed *actions* of the trinitarian persons *ad extra*. This would put all questions about divine *essence* in a trinitarian context from the beginning. What impact would defining the divine essence in trinitarian terms have on a doctrine of providence? In order to explore this possibility, the next chapter will investigate two prominent trinitarian theologians who seek to develop a model of providence from this perspective.

First, however, I will now look at another trinitarian theologian who takes seriously the biblical language of divine interaction with creation, and constructs a theology of providence from an Arminian (and 'openness') point of view.

### JOHN SANDERS: THE DIVINE DIRECTOR

The recent development of the so-called open view<sup>588</sup> of God and the God-world relation continues to accentuate the longstanding debate between those theologians who, on the one hand, prefer to stress God's sovereign control of the

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<sup>587</sup>Craig, *Time and Eternity*, 85-86, 86.

<sup>588</sup>The 'open view of God' received widespread attention as a result of the publication of *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), by Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, and David Basinger. Cf. also, Clark H. Pinnock, ed., *The Grace of God and the Will of Man* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1995).

world (Christian classical theists), and those who, on the other hand, hold to a libertarian view of human freedom and a concept of God's sovereignty in which he self-limits his providential activity to partial control of the world (open or free-will theists).<sup>589</sup> We have looked at one trinitarian theologian (Helm) who represents a traditional Reformed view of providence, but who does not integrate the doctrines of Trinity and providence. I will now briefly summarise the doctrine of providence as presented by another trinitarian theologian, but from the openness perspective, and in the process ask how his account links together the concepts of providence, meaning and Trinity.

### **AN OVERVIEW OF SANDERS' THEOLOGICAL AGENDA AND METHOD**

In direct contrast to Helm, John Sanders, working with an open model of God, posits a 'risky' view of providence. His motivation for constructing such a model revolves around two issues. First, there is the incoherence he finds in the 'no-risk' model of providence. He cannot reconcile the concept of an all-powerful and all-good God with the idea of a God who directly causes suffering.<sup>590</sup> Moreover, he claims that the risk model 'is superior to the no-risk model of providence in having greater fidelity to the biblical story, a more coherent view of the nature of God and better approaches to life-application issues such as evil, prayer, guidance and a

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<sup>589</sup>Even a brief sampling of the reaction to the openness view reveals how strongly entrenched all sides of the debate remain: Norman Geisler, referring to the openness model as 'neotheism,' 'warns of a dangerous trend within evangelical circles of creating God in man's image' and of departing 'from the traditional view of God held by the Fathers of the church from the earliest times' to today (Creating God in the Image of Man? [Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1997], 11). Similar warnings appear in the fly leaf of Bruce Ware's, God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), listing criticisms by J. I. Packer, John Piper, R. Albert Mohler, Jr., Michael Horton, Wayne Grudem, Millard J. Erickson, Bruce Demarest, D. A. Carson, Francis J. Beckwith, and Mark R. Talbot. John Frame, in a sympathetic review of Paul Helm's, The Providence of God, draws attention to what he judges to be a general consensus among current Christian philosophers of religion: they have a weak view of 'biblical authority, . . . [they hold] the conviction that divine supra-temporality must be jettisoned for philosophical reasons, and . . . [they espouse] the idea that the problem of evil and the nature of human moral responsibility require us to adopt an indeterminist concept of human freedom such as was advocated by Pelagius, Molina, and Arminius' ('Review of The Providence of God,' Westminster Theological Journal 56, no. 2 [Fall 1994]: 438-439).

<sup>590</sup>In light of Helm's account of compatibilism's understanding of human freedom as *volitional* freedom (i.e., the freedom to do what one *desires*), it should be noted that Sanders is not quite accurate in representing the Reformed or Calvinist view of divine-human relations in terms of God '*forcing* his will on others' (John Sanders, The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 175 [italics mine]).

personal relationship with God.<sup>591</sup> Second, he understands that to be human, by definition, requires libertarian freedom.<sup>592</sup> The possibility of the experience of libertarian freedom requires in turn a 'genuine give-and-take'<sup>593</sup> model of God-human relations.

In agreement with Helm, Sanders looks to the Bible as the authoritative source of data for his theology of providence, but he arrives at a very different conclusion as to the meaning of that data.

### The Source of Sanders' Doctrine of Providence

Sanders, like Helm, claims to adopt a listening approach to what the Bible says about God and his activity in the world. In this method, Sanders maintains he is adopting the methodology of the Reformers: that is, taking an inductive and deductive look at 'what God has done in salvation history' as 'the source of our knowledge of God' rather than 'the God known by purely by [*sic*] rational thought (*dignum Deo*).'<sup>594</sup> Thus, 'we should try to discern what sort of sovereignty God has freely chosen to practice' by looking 'to revelation to see what exactly God has decided to do.'<sup>595</sup>

Sanders notes that both Calvinistic and Arminian models of God 'use the same Bible, [and] often even the same text against each other.'<sup>596</sup> He contends

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<sup>591</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 19. It should be noted that when the terms 'relation,' or 'relational theism' are used with reference to Sanders' doctrine of God, they mean specifically *reciprocal* relations in which what humans do affect what God does. This is different than the kind of divine-human relationship Helm described in which *our* responses to God reflect a real change in us, but the *appearance* of God's responses to us are anthropomorphisms--they are not really reciprocal. Sanders critiques 'the tradition' for having 'sometimes rejected the notion of divine conditionality while simultaneously affirming the personal, responsive and loving nature of God's relationship to us' (Sanders, *Risks*, 281).

<sup>592</sup>Cf. Sanders, *Risks*, 45; cf. also, *ibid.*, 176, 220-224, 228.

<sup>593</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 282.

<sup>594</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 43, 153. Sanders seems not to give sufficient credit to Helm's listening approach, since Helm too, takes scripture to be the governing source in doing theology. He does not, as Sanders suggests, *first* decide what God must be like, but rather makes a decision about which model of God best explains all the data of scripture.

<sup>595</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 11, 43; cf. *ibid.*, 145, 168, 173, 188, 190.

<sup>596</sup>Sanders, 'God as Personal,' in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1995), 167.

further that the classical or “absolutistic” conception of God’ is derived from ‘a synthesis of Greek and biblical thought,’ and as such functions as a ‘control belief’ which depersonalises God.<sup>597</sup> Since, however, the anthropomorphic metaphors the Bible uses to speak about God are divinely inspired, Sanders advocates deriving our knowledge of God from them, rather than from the supposedly “supra-personal” terms of Greek thought.<sup>598</sup> As we saw earlier, Helm suggested that whether or not the actual terms have a Greek source is immaterial—they are required in order to express the concepts behind the ‘exact’ language about God in the Bible. Sanders, however, suggests the ‘Greek philosophic terms’ used to describe God ‘are just as anthropomorphic as the metaphors in the Bible,’ the key difference being that the latter are inspired.<sup>599</sup> He then proceeds to survey key biblical texts which support a relational and personal model of the God-world relation. Sanders also analyses some verses and passages traditionally associated with the risk-free view of providence, explaining them in a way compatible with the openness view.<sup>600</sup> The problem with his approach is that he *asserts*, but never adequately *develops*, a hermeneutic of scripture that justifies his selective view of determining when to read a scriptural reference to God’s nature as metaphorical (God’s “arms”), and when to take it literally, such as statements of God’s emotions.<sup>601</sup>

Bruce Ware contends there is a fundamental incoherence or inconsistency in open theists’ use of scripture.<sup>602</sup> While the open theists strongly affirm God’s exhaustive knowledge of the past and present,<sup>603</sup> some of the scriptures they use to

<sup>597</sup>Sanders, ‘God as Personal,’ 167, 180, n. 39.

<sup>598</sup>Sanders, ‘God as Personal,’ 173.

<sup>599</sup>Sanders, ‘God as Personal,’ 173.

<sup>600</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, chaps. 3 and 4.

<sup>601</sup>Cf. Sanders, *Risks*, 20. It is actually this basic hermeneutical decision which makes his interpretations of scripture ‘unfalsifiable’ (Robert Picirilli, ‘An Arminian Response to John Sanders’s *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence*, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44, no. 3 [September 2001]: 480.

<sup>602</sup>Bruce Ware, *God’s Lesser Glory*, 74-76, 82-86.

<sup>603</sup>Cf. Sanders’ ‘presentism’ (*Risks*, 129).

deny God's exhaustive knowledge of the future, on a 'plain' reading of scripture,<sup>604</sup> would *also* deny God's exhaustive knowledge of the *past* and *present*.

As with Helm, we see once again that a prior hermeneutic of scripture governs *what* Sanders hears from the Bible. This is not to imply that the hermeneutics of either theologian is uninformed by scripture, only that a set of second level (theological) reasons or arguments finally determine how they read scripture. While Sanders does not explicitly admit that such a theological hermeneutic governs his reading of scripture, he implicitly concedes the point when he follows John Piper in maintaining that a theologian's decision as to what is God's highest commitment determines his or her view of whether God enacts 'specific' or 'general sovereignty,' and therefore whether providence will be of the meticulous variety or of the project form. Thus, the Arminian view that God's highest goal is "human self-determination and the possible resulting love relationship with God" contrasts with the Calvinist view "that the greater value is the manifestation of the full range of God's glory in wrath and mercy."<sup>605</sup> It becomes readily apparent that this fundamental theological decision will control how one interprets the biblical data about God and God's relation to the world. Therefore, the real basis of disagreement between Sanders' and Helm's doctrines of providence seems to lie in the set of conceptual presuppositions and theological criteria which govern their hermeneutic of scripture more than in the data of scripture itself.

Sanders applies his hermeneutic to understanding God and God's attributes<sup>606</sup> and also for understanding God's actions in history. He concludes (not surprisingly) that

the Scriptures depict God in dynamic give-and-take relationships with his creatures. God has sovereignly decided not to control everything that happens. . . . In some things, God has decided to be conditioned by us. Divine

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<sup>604</sup>Cf. Gregory Boyd, God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 87.

<sup>605</sup>Sanders, Risks, 218.

<sup>606</sup>Sanders, Risks, chap. 6; cf. *ibid.*, 192.

conditionality is the watershed issue between the risk and no-risk views of providence.<sup>607</sup>

Thus 'divine conditionality' becomes the root metaphor in Sanders' understanding of the God-world relation.<sup>608</sup>

## The God-World Relation

Sanders summarises his view of the God-human relation under 'four major points':

First, God loves us and desires for us to enter into reciprocal relations of love with him and with our fellow creatures. The divine intention in creating us was for us to experience the triune love and respond to it with love of our own. In this we would freely come to collaborate with God toward the achievement of God's goals. Second, God has sovereignly decided to make some of his actions contingent on our requests and actions. God establishes a project and elicits our free collaboration in it. Hence there is conditionality in God, for God truly responds to what we do. Third, God chooses to exercise general rather than meticulous providence, allowing space for us to operate and for God to be creative and resourceful in working with us. Fourth, God has granted us the libertarian freedom necessary for a truly personal relationship of love to develop. In summary, God freely enters into genuine give-and-take relations with us. This entails risk taking on his part because we are capable of letting God down. This understanding of divine providence deeply affects our views concerning salvation, suffering and evil, prayer and divine guidance.<sup>609</sup>

For those who agree with Helm's view, such a view raises two questions. First, can this God put strong redemptive meaning into history? Second, are the events of history so conditioned by the seemingly random choices of humans, that God has no *ultimate* control over the outcome of events? William Hasker (an open theist) puts it thus:

Is the account of divine providential control given here strong enough to secure the interests of Christian faith? And is God

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<sup>607</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 280; cf. *ibid.*, 178.

<sup>608</sup>Cf. Sanders, *Risks*, 175.

<sup>609</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 282; cf. *ibid.*, 169-170. For a similar summary, cf. Pinnock, et. al., *The Openness of God*, 7.



as conceived in free will theism great enough to be the proper object of Christian worship?<sup>610</sup>

Sanders attempts to answer these kinds of questions by positing a view of God in active engagement with the world, an interaction which incorporates the results of human free choices, and yet allows God to achieve his ultimate or overall goals for the world through innovative and resourceful providence. It is this model of the God-world relation which functions as the context of meaning in Sanders' theology of providence.

### ***DIVINE PROVIDENTIAL INTERACTION AND MEANING IN HISTORY***

Paul Helm pointed out that a doctrine of providence can function as a key component in a philosophy of history.<sup>611</sup> Gilkey developed his doctrine of providence based upon a phenomenological analysis of common human experience, demonstrating in turn that such a doctrine functions as an interpretative grid for our experiences of life. If one can think of this type of meaning-making role for providence as applying not only to a philosophy of history but also to a *theology* of history, this would bring it into close proximity with one's worldview. While it would not be accurate to identify a doctrine of providence with a worldview, once one has made the decision to be a Christian theist (one possible worldview) a doctrine of providence then functions in a criterial role in one's interpretation of life's events, that is, as a framework of meaning and meaning-making. What one thinks, in turn, about God and God's relation to the world (as embodied in a doctrine of providence) will decide the kind of meaning one derives from applying one's doctrine of providence to those same events.

### **Sanders' Framework of Meaning**

The larger context or framework in which Sanders' doctrine of providence functions can be summarised briefly as follows: God is in the process of working out a creative and providential project in which libertarianly free human beings interact with the triune God on a personal level. This personal interaction is the central

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<sup>610</sup>William Hasker, 'Providence and Evil: Three Theories,' *Religious Studies* 28, no. 1 (March 1992): 102-3. Hasker is himself a free will theist.

<sup>611</sup>Helm, *Providence*, 118.

difference Sanders wants to highlight between his and Helm's models of providence. Because Sanders' doctrine of providence takes the biblical portrayal of God's interaction with humans at face value, he claims his model has a greater coherence with the scriptural portrayal of God.<sup>612</sup> Such interaction *requires* a different understanding of divine sovereignty than that employed in classical models of providence. Sanders claims, in fact, that the key issue for a doctrine of providence is not the nature of divine knowledge, but the kind of sovereignty God has chosen to exercise.<sup>613</sup> He states:

If God foreordains all things, then God is not a risk taker. If God does not control every detail that occurs, then God takes risks--whether he has simple foreknowledge, timeless knowledge, knowledge of all possibilities, middle knowledge or present knowledge.<sup>614</sup>

Sanders adopts David Basinger's argument that 'the central component of risk taking is not a lack of knowledge of the outcome at the time of commitment but the decision to grant creatures the freedom to be significant others from God.' This 'decision' in turn determines 'the specific rules of the game that God elects to establish for the creature.'<sup>615</sup> Without this kind of freedom, risk could be excluded from the divine project, but humans could not be human as we presently understand them.

In the context of this self-limited sovereignty, God works out his purpose for the world, not according to a detailed master plan, but in keeping with 'a general overall strategy,' 'a historical project,' the details of which remain flexible.<sup>616</sup> Because God has limited the exercise of his sovereign omniscience and omnipotence, his specific will for individuals and particular situations can be thwarted.

As creator he established the rules by which the game of life operates. Yet in his superiority Yahweh saw fit to create and

<sup>612</sup>Cf. Sanders' critique of 'evangelical Calvinism' on this point (*Risks*, 160-161).

<sup>613</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 195.

<sup>614</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 199-200; cf. also, *ibid.*, 12, 171, 245.

<sup>615</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 171.

<sup>616</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 13, 88.

bind himself to the rules whereby he would be 'defenseless' or vulnerable . . . by sharing his powers with his creatures. . . . Because of this sharing of powers Yahweh has made it possible that his will may not be done; that he may not accomplish everything he desires.<sup>617</sup>

It is this self-limitation in the original creative design of humans which entails that God does not know that part of the future which depends on free human choices. Sanders does suggest that God, given his infinite wisdom and total knowledge of present events (a type of knowledge Sanders calls 'presentism'), can make shrewd predictions about the future, but this is not the same as infallibly knowing the future. God can, however, infallibly predict what *he* decides he will do in the future, since it is in his omnipotent power to achieve what he wills.<sup>618</sup>

The 'risk' aspect in this model of providence derives, therefore, from Sanders' free will view of human freedom, and from his view of the kind of sovereignty God must employ to achieve his goal of having humans freely choose to participate in the inner-trinitarian sharing of love. The result is 'a messy view of providence' in which 'God sometimes brings events to a determined head and at other times allows events to go their way.' Sanders notes that 'deism and pancausality offer more straightforward perspectives in which God uniformly does nothing or uniformly does everything.'<sup>619</sup> Sanders argues that the phenomenon of God intervening to rescue one person from suffering while seeming to neglect another does not give rise to the charge of arbitrariness in God's actions because all these interventions are carried out in the interest of the divine project, and thus are always in response to choices humans have made.<sup>620</sup> Sanders concurs with Frank Tupper's view that 'divine providence is exercised "in conjunction with and conditioned by the historically defined context of time and place, the participation of human agents, the extent of the development in the situation, and the limits and

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<sup>617</sup>Sanders, 'God as Personal,' 175.

<sup>618</sup>Cf. Sanders, *Risks*, 12, 52-53, 72-75, 129-137.

<sup>619</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 87.

<sup>620</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 298, n. 166.

possibilities available.’”<sup>621</sup> This requirement of a free will view of providence explains how Sanders would refute Helm’s charge that the open view makes God more culpable for evil than does the no-risk view, because God *can* intervene to prevent evil, but does not always do so. In the risky view the *possibility* of evil is a necessary risk in order to achieve the greater good of developing free human responses to divine grace.

This ‘messy’ view of God’s providential relation to the world, while not preventing God from achieving his ultimate goal for those who freely choose to love him, allows humans to become co-creators or co-shapers of history with God. ‘The actual course of divine providence,’ and therefore of history, ‘works itself out through and in response to . . . specific human choices.’<sup>622</sup> God does not just work *through* history but *with* history.<sup>623</sup> Drawing upon Frank Tupper’s ‘analogy of the master weaver,’ Sanders suggests that God, as the ‘master weaver[,] utilizes the possibilities open at any given time in order to weave his purposes into the tapestry. The tapestry is not finished, and God is *weaving alongside us* to produce it.’<sup>624</sup> This synergy between divine and human choices results in the emergence of truly new options in God’s relation with creation. Sanders also appeals to Timothy Gorringer’s use of the analogy of ‘rough theatre.’<sup>625</sup> In this model the ‘divine director’ (God), through his ‘inventiveness’ and ‘patience,’ engages the “audience” in the creation of story (history), and in this way is ‘creative without being manipulative.’<sup>626</sup> In this way, God is not only alongside, but is co-creator with humans, since ‘the work of God depends on the resources available in any given situation and the cooperation of

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<sup>621</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 93.

<sup>622</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 99; cf. *ibid.*, 246.

<sup>623</sup>Cf. Sanders, *Risks*, 128, 137, 138.

<sup>624</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 127 (italics mine).

<sup>625</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 217.

<sup>626</sup>T. J. Gorringer, *God’s Theatre: A Theology of Providence* (London, UK: SCM Press, 1991), 80-82.

humans.<sup>627</sup> At this point God's interaction with humans bears similarities to Gilkey's divine 'lure.'

Sanders' language at times can lead one to think he is collapsing God's creative and providential action into one ongoing act of continuous creation.<sup>628</sup> The fact that Sanders seems to understand God's present creative-providential activity to result in the eschatological 'new heaven and earth' can make providence seem to be an aspect of an ongoing creative project which evolves into a final kingdom.<sup>629</sup> In spite of appearances, however, he seems to work with the concept of an original creation *ex nihilo* which set up certain broad 'boundaries . . . around the forces of chaos' and established the general 'structures' of creation, after which the 'divine providence' creates 'an environment for the sustenance of the creatures, granting divine blessing on them, establishing communities of relationships and bestowing tasks to be accomplished.'<sup>630</sup>

It is evident, therefore, that on the open or no-risk view, there may be no discernible pattern or overarching plan in history. Helm had noted that we cannot discern God's providential plan writ large across the cosmos or history because it is hidden in God's eternal decree. Nevertheless, in Helm's model, one can in principle ascribe everything that happens to God's control and plan. Sanders' model, however, pictures a much more ambiguous providential pattern in history because history, embodied in the structures of nature and human life, is the product of the synergy between God and humans. The particular contents or shape of the divine plan *emerges* as a dynamic, ever-changing gestalt,<sup>631</sup> even though the ultimate goal of the project is the achieving of a certain way of relating to God. In Sanders' model, God's present project involves primarily the transformation of individuals and only

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<sup>627</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 137.

<sup>628</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 42: 'As Creator, God has not finished being creative, for he continues to introduce new things into history.'

<sup>629</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 42; cf. *ibid.*, 186, 187, 191, 192, 207, 214.

<sup>630</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 41, 42, 43, 45.

<sup>631</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 231-232.

secondarily, societal benefits.<sup>632</sup> Thus, there is a distinct *ontological* basis to the ambiguity in Sanders model of providence.<sup>633</sup> The *hiddenness* of God's providential action in Sanders' model is an intrinsic consequence of God's openness and human libertarian freedom. The appearance of ambiguity in Helm's model, however, has to do with lack of *epistemic access* to God's plan. If, on either an epistemic (Helm) or ontological basis (Sanders), God's providential plan and activity *must* remain largely hidden to human eyes, what might this mean for a doctrine of providence as a context for meaning? Although this question will be raised again in Pannenberg's and Moltmann's doctrines of providence, it will be addressed in more detail in the final chapter.

There appears to be a practical similarity here between Sanders' focus on God's adaptive providential activity and Christoph Schwöbel's suggestion that perhaps there is no need for a separate doctrine of providence. Schwöbel argues that the three types of divine action (creation, revelation, and inspiration, corresponding to the three divine persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, respectively) are '*already* providential.' He notes, therefore, that

since the notion of divine providential agency does not in fact add anything to the concept of divine agency as understood in the trinitarian model I have sketched here, it could be questioned whether there should be a separate doctrine *de providentia divina*. Rather, it seems that the proper place for the concept of providence in Christian doctrine would more nearly be in the section headed in traditional works of dogmatic theology *de fide*.<sup>634</sup>

Although Helm's model of providence also focuses on the *how*, it makes a stronger claim about the content (or, the *what*) of God's providential plan since *everything* that happens does so in accordance with God's providential decree--God saves *because* redemption is part of his eternal providential plan. In Sanders' model, however, God's creative and redemptive actions are *providential* in that they manifest God's caring attitude and continuing commitment to his project. Perhaps

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<sup>632</sup>Cf. Sanders, *Risks*, 127.

<sup>633</sup>Cf. Sanders, *Risks*, 233.

<sup>634</sup>Christoph Schwöbel, 'Divine Agency and Providence,' *Modern Theology* 3, no. 3 (April 1987): 241, 242-243.



what saves Sanders' model from being only an inference of faith is his insistence on God's special *interventions* which ensure his project is not ultimately frustrated, and which prevents God's providential activity from being reduced to a hidden, uniform lure (Gilkey) or general preservation (Wiles).

Sanders' 'framework for meaning,' therefore, requires an adaptive, innovative, and resourceful providence.<sup>635</sup> While he never works out in any detail *how* God can intervene at will (sometimes miraculously) to achieve unilaterally his will on specific occasions without violating the principle of human libertarian freedom, Sanders clearly maintains that he does.<sup>636</sup>

Moreover, he argues further that such a model of providence finds support in God's nature as Trinity, and more specifically, in the Trinity's open, relational love. This raises the question of how Sanders incorporates or utilises a trinitarian ontology in explicating the open view of God and providence.

### **Innovative Providence and a Trinitarian God**

Adopting a listening approach in his interpretation of scripture has led Sanders to give priority to observing how God has actually decided to relate to the world.<sup>637</sup> It has also led him to understand Jesus in a triple paradigmatic role: as the archetypal revelation for God's risky providential action; as the definitive revelation of the character of God in terms of personhood, love and relationality; and as supplying the indispensable data for understanding that God is Trinity.<sup>638</sup> In view of his hermeneutical decision and his conclusions about the significance of Jesus Christ, how does he, in fact, relate a doctrine of the Trinity to his theology of providence?

First, he notes that Jesus is the paradigmatic example of God's providence at work: 'We have to observe what God has chosen to do in history--based

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<sup>635</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 213.

<sup>636</sup>Cf. Sanders, *Risks*, 79, 169, 172-173, 231, 234.

<sup>637</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 43.

<sup>638</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 92-95, 115-116, 106, 108-112, 91.

preeminently on the history of Israel and Jesus of Nazareth--rather than simply define the type of sovereignty God must exercise.'<sup>639</sup> Sanders argues that

christology is the great stumbling stone to the classical view of omnipotence. Our view of divine power, providence and sovereignty must pass through the lens of Jesus if they are to come into focus regarding the nature of God. Metaphors such as king and potter must be interpreted in the light of Jesus rather than our normal understanding of kings and potters.<sup>640</sup>

Clearly, in taking Jesus' interaction with the Father to be paradigmatic of God's providential relationship to the world, the central issue with which Sanders is concerned is that of divine sovereignty and human free will. His interest lies mainly in finding support for an openness in God's providential will which allows for an adjusting of his project to the exigencies of the moment. Sanders emphasises that

if we begin with the God who comes to us, especially as seen in Jesus, then it is possible to see God as interactive, parental, generous, sensitive, cooperative, wise and mighty in the working out of his project. If the divine project and the particular paths God has sovereignly elected to pursue in history are kept in mind, then it is possible to qualify the traditional list of divine attributes in light of the scriptural revelation. Then it becomes clear that God has all the wisdom, knowledge and power needed to work with the sort of world he freely decided to create. If God is seen as involved in a personal way with a project in which he freely enters into give-and-take interpersonal relations, then four attributes of God come to the fore: love, wisdom, faithful freedom and almightiness.<sup>641</sup>

Only such a model will serve the interest of God's project, that is, the development of 'people who love and trust him in response to his love and manifest their love of God in effective action to others.'<sup>642</sup> Given this general goal, it is impossible even for God to predict 'the way everything in human history will go,' either for those who have faith or for those who do not. Essentially, 'what we do

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<sup>639</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 11; cf. *ibid.*, 138.

<sup>640</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 116; cf. *ibid.*, 26, 115, 137.

<sup>641</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 174-175.

<sup>642</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 124.

know, through Jesus, is the direction in which God is moving: producing Christlike people (Rom 8:29) to inhabit the new Jerusalem (Rev 21).<sup>643</sup>

Sanders gives very little attention to exploring the trinitarian relations for suggestions that God's creative/providential project might depend on each of the trinitarian persons playing a *specific* role in relation to humans. He does, however, understand the Son's incarnation to be the result of the Father's sending, and he sees the present age as the time of the Spirit's innovative work in the church and world.<sup>644</sup>

Second, he perceives in the intra-trinitarian love (as manifested in Jesus' relation to the Father) a model for human love. He refers to the Trinity as a 'tripersonal community in which each member of the triune being gives and receives love from the others.'<sup>645</sup> As a context or 'framework for meaning,' God's providential presence and action in the world is aimed at facilitating in humans the creation and expression of the mutual love the trinitarian persons share with one another.<sup>646</sup> Sanders also calls attention to the experience of Jesus (God incarnate) as evidence that God's love is not invulnerable to suffering and disappointment.<sup>647</sup> Sanders makes no note, however, of the difference between the infinite divine love and finite human expressions of mutual love. Traditionally, the concept 'God' constitutes a *sui generis* category. The unique character of the inner-trinitarian relations would seem to preclude any straightforward extrapolation from these relations to the Trinity-world relation. Miroslav Volf voices a caution in this regard: the inner-trinitarian love is 'the perfect cycle of self-donations [which] must start simultaneously at all points. This is why only God is love properly speaking (1 John 4:8)--God conceived as a communion of perfect lovers.' Thus, 'the internal love of the Trinity' is a 'love that dances,' while 'the love that suffers is that same love

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<sup>643</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 127, 125, 127.

<sup>644</sup>Cf. Sanders, *Risks*, 128, 138, 26, 32-33.

<sup>645</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 175 (While Sanders' language here could be taken as indicating a tri-theistic view of God, it probably reflects instead the lack of a carefully stated doctrine of the Trinity.) Sanders does not discuss what the differences might be between the freedom exercised by the trinitarian Persons and that of humans--for e.g., the difference between volitional and libertarian freedom.

<sup>646</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 170.

<sup>647</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 178, 180-181.

turned toward a world suffused with enmity.’ ‘The Trinitarian cycle of perfect self-donations *cannot* be simply repeated in the world of sin; the engagement with that world entails a process of complex and difficult *translation*.’<sup>648</sup>

Again, while this use of the Trinity may help to define a central characteristic of the divine love as such, it does not say anything explicitly about the distinctions of the trinitarian persons either in relation to each other or to humans. All that this reference to the Trinity unfolds is the fact of the *mutuality* of the inner-trinitarian love, a principle which is then applied to the Trinity’s relation (as such) to humans. In effect he continues to treat the Trinity as a self-contained unit as far as its relation to creation is concerned.

Finally, he uses the Trinity to show that God is personal, as opposed to the impersonal model of the classical theist tradition.<sup>649</sup> Sanders takes the non-reciprocal relation of God to humans in classical theism to be impersonal. He defines ‘personal’ (in reference to God) as describing ‘a being who relates with other beings; who loves, suffers, intends, enacts intentions, responds to others and so on. Minimally, we see God as a personal agent.’<sup>650</sup> In Sanders’ view of the Trinity, ‘personhood is the ultimate ontological category. Personhood, relationality and community--not power, independence and control--become the center for understanding the nature of God.’<sup>651</sup> What Sanders does not unpack here is what makes the *threefold* personhood of the Trinity unique. Beyond supporting the notion of mutuality in relationships, therefore, one is left wondering how an appeal to the *Trinity* helps to further refine our understanding of God’s personhood, especially as seen in the relation of the divine persons to humans.

Essentially Sanders argues that the Trinity’s relations *ad extra* are defined definitively in the history of God’s relation to Israel and especially in his relations with the God-man, Jesus Christ. He then uses this knowledge of the economic

<sup>648</sup>Miroslav Volf, “‘The Trinity is our Social Program’: The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement,” *Modern Theology* 14 (July 1998): 413, 414.

<sup>649</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 175.

<sup>650</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 160, 26.

<sup>651</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 175.

Trinity as support for his contention that all God's relations (*ad intra* and *ad extra*) are defined by an openness to being influenced by others, and that God is personal in a way which is, in some sense, analogous to human personality. His intent is to find in a personal and relational ontology of the immanent Trinity (as revealed in the economy) the grounds for reciprocal divine-human relationships.<sup>652</sup> Although he does not use the term 'perichoresis' in relation to the Trinity, he seems to assume the concept in his understanding of the mutuality of the inner-trinitarian relations. But this raises the question of possible ontological differences between the way the trinitarian persons give and receive being and identity to and from each other, and the way in which humans derive their being from God and from each other. Are humans constituted as relational persons in the same way as the trinitarian persons?

There are two further problems with the way he handles this approach. First, the attributes he defines relationally (love, wisdom, faithful freedom, almightiness and omniscience<sup>653</sup>) need not be a reflection of God as *Trinity*; they could be the reflection of God as a *Unity*. His appeal to 'a trinitarian metaphysics'<sup>654</sup> for insight into the ontological basis of the openness of God in his relations *ad extra* amounts to a *confirmation* of a view of God's character and relations *ad extra* already held, and could equally well apply to a unitarian God's relation to the world. Might not a *unitarian* God also enter into personal, give-and-take relations with humans? For example, Vincent Brümmer's criteria for a personal God do not seem to *require* God to be trinitarian in order to enter into '*personal relationship[s]*,' which he defines as requiring the exercise of the 'initiative of *both* partners in the relationship.'<sup>655</sup> In his appeal to the Trinity as a support for God's relational personhood, Sanders never

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<sup>652</sup>Cf. his critique of Calvin for failing to do this (Sanders, *Risks*, 156-157).

<sup>653</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, Ch. 6.

<sup>654</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 175.

<sup>655</sup>Vincent Brümmer, *Speaking of a Personal God: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 75. Although Sanders uses Brümmer's definition of love, and also seems to assume a similar view of personhood, he does not explicitly reference Brümmer with respect to the latter.

clarifies which trinitarian model he favours, and he fails to take us beyond the affirmation that ‘the Father, Son and Holy Spirit love one another.’<sup>656</sup>

In light of his failure to say more about his doctrine of the Trinity, perhaps Sanders claims too much when he says an appeal to ‘a trinitarian God of love who enters into loving personal relations with his creatures gives some direction to the doctrine of providence.’<sup>657</sup> Although he rightly points out that the self-revelation of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit indicates a *trinitarian* ontology or metaphysics, his appeal to that ontology *implies* that God enters into reciprocal relations with humans *because* that is an intrinsic aspect of the triune nature. While it may be appropriate to claim that one’s knowledge of God as Trinity *supports*, or at least does not vitiate, an understanding of God in open relationships with creatures, one would need to *substantiate* the stronger claim that a trinitarian ontology of personhood characterised by ‘relationality and community,’<sup>658</sup> *entails* open relationships with humans. Just because the trinitarian persons relate responsively to *each other* in love is no guarantee that God might not be a *triune* ‘potentate forcing his will on [human] others.’ Sanders argues, here, that knowing God is ‘a tripersonal community’ of persons giving and receiving love from each other assures us that ‘God is no solitary potentate forcing his will on others.’ To say, however, that ‘the tripersonal God is the perfection of love and communion . . . [and therefore] the very antithesis of aloofness, isolation and domination,’<sup>659</sup> is not the same as saying the trinitarian God is the perfection of interactive ‘love and communion’ *because* God is Trinity. It is not enough, therefore, to talk about divine openness or relationality (for example) only in relation to a single divine essence, if that essence is assumed to be openly relational *because* it is trinitarian. Thus, the openness of the trinitarian persons’ actual (concrete) relations to creation, and therefore the possibility of humans sharing in a limited way in the inner-trinitarian relations, must form the *context* in which one explicates the Trinity’s providential relation to creation. Perhaps this latter

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<sup>656</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 175.

<sup>657</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 175.

<sup>658</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 175.

<sup>659</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 175.



conclusion may serve as a criterion in constructing a trinitarian doctrine of providence.

The second problem with Sanders' appeal to a trinitarian ontology as defining his theology of providence arises from his narrow focus, that is, it is not enough to talk about God as *personal* and *relational* only in terms of the kind of *sovereignty* God exercises, because this fails to take seriously the logically prior question of the ontology of the trinitarian nature.<sup>660</sup> While Sanders rightly argues that a doctrine of the Trinity *supports* (or *could* support) a model of personal and loving relations between God and humans, he has not clarified how or why. He might have followed the lead of Walter Kasper, for example, who has put forth a "trinitarian ontology" of 'the selflessness of love,' and thus of 'the ultimate reality . . . [as] . . . person, who is fully conceivable only in the relationality of giving and receiving.'<sup>661</sup> Although Kasper seems to work with a subordinationist view of the relations among the trinitarian persons, and an "emanationist" doctrine of creation, the point here is that he first links the differentiated acts of selfless love of the economic Trinity with the ontology of the immanent Trinity. Only then does he make the case that such a trinitarian ontology logically requires God to be personal and relational toward humans. In this way the doctrine of the economic/immanent Trinity forms both the 'summation of the entire Christian mystery of salvation and, at the same time, its grammar.'<sup>662</sup> Seen in this way, the priority given to such a 'grammar' in constructing theological models suggests that all other doctrines be explicated in light of it.

Perhaps a more complete development of a trinitarian ontology (metaphysics) would also enable Sanders to respond to Alfred Freddoso's critique of the lack of a metaphysical structure in Open Theism with which to replace the traditional account

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<sup>660</sup>Cf. Randall Otto's critique of the way in which recent treatments of 'perichoresis' divorces it from ontology ('The Use and Abuse of Perichoresis in Recent Theology,' Scottish Journal of Theology 54, no. 3 [2001]: 366-384).

<sup>661</sup>Walter Kasper, The God of Jesus Christ, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1984, 1987), 310.

<sup>662</sup>Walter Kasper, God of Jesus Christ, 311; cf. 314. Cf. the similar methodological move made by Colin Gunton, The One, The Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity, The 1992 Bampton Lectures (New York, NY; Melbourne, Australia; Cambridge, UK: 1993), 225, n. 19.

of divine transcendence. He wonders, for instance, upon what basis ‘Hasker and the others’ have decided to retain the divine attribute of immateriality, while rejecting that of immutability.<sup>663</sup>

One might respond on behalf of the openness view by suggesting that openness theologians are in fact treating the divine ‘openness’ itself as a substitute for the traditional attributes of immutability and impassibility. Thus, they are not merely deleting (deconstructing) ‘immutability’ but rather substituting (reconstructing) ‘faithfulness’<sup>664</sup> as more compatible with an openness metaphysics. Perhaps in this model, transcendent immutability need not be thought of as a logical entailment of immateriality. God’s transcendence (‘otherness’) is protected in this model by God’s personal (libertarian) freedom to create or not create a world.<sup>665</sup> Moreover, it seems that the openness model is treating the personal and relational view of the Trinity as itself constituting a new metaphysics.

In keeping with such a response is Robert Jenson’s claim that ‘the doctrine of the Trinity was the creation, if one will, of a *new ontology* of “God” on the basis of the gospel. The doctrine of the Trinity is the ancient church’s victory over the timeless Presence of Greek religion.’<sup>666</sup> Colin Gunton advances Jenson’s insight here with a stronger emphasis on how this trinitarian ontology contributed ‘to the concept of the person.’ He does so through use of the idea of ‘space’: in order for God and the world to exist in relation they must be ontologically distinct, a requirement which all unitarian proposals (such as deism) fail to uphold. Gunton, in fact, claims that ‘the logic of all unitarian thought is immanentist in the sense that it finally brings God and the creation too closely together: either the world is swallowed up in deity, or its reality is the logical, and so necessitated, outcome of the

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<sup>663</sup>Alfred Freddoso, ‘Reply to Hasker,’ 133; cf. *ibid.*, 132-133. Cf. also Thomas Flint’s critique of open theism (*Divine Providence: The Molinist Account*, Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion [Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998], 95-107).

<sup>664</sup>Cf. Sanders, *Risks*, 184-188.

<sup>665</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 185.

<sup>666</sup>Robert Jenson, as quoted by Colin Gunton, *Promise*, 129.

way God is.’<sup>667</sup> Philip Clayton, for example, in the interest of maintaining this same distinction between God and the world, has had to develop ‘a dipolar concept of God’ to ensure his panentheistic model of the infinite God’s relation to the finite world will avoid the absorption of the world into God.<sup>668</sup>

Thus, a doctrine of the Trinity ensures both the physical otherness (the world is a ‘contingent, non-necessary reality’) and personal otherness of humans.<sup>669</sup> Individual personhood in this model is ensured by the perichoretic ‘relation-in-otherness’<sup>670</sup> of the trinitarian persons, and the divine eternity becomes ‘neither timelessness nor everlasting time but a function of the personal space’ in which the trinitarian persons ‘give to and receive from each other what they are.’<sup>671</sup>

The foregoing discussion raises the question as to whether Sanders, in keeping with his hermeneutic of listening to the way God *actually* chooses to relate to the world, has paid enough attention to the significance of the differentiated roles of the trinitarian persons in their relations to the world.<sup>672</sup> In one summary of the openness of God’s project, he does give a rather cryptic account of how the trinitarian persons define the divine project. He suggests that Jesus, as ‘*the image of God,*’ provides us with

the definitive statement on what God is like and for the direction in which God is working to bring his project to fruition. Wherever the Holy Spirit blows, he seeks to take

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<sup>667</sup>Gunton, *Promise*, 129. Cf. Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, The Didsbury Lectures (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Carlisle, UK: The Paternoster Press, 1992), 74-79.

<sup>668</sup>Philip Clayton, *The Problem of God in Modern Thought* (Cambridge, UK; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 478-479; cf. *ibid.*, 495-498.

<sup>669</sup>Gunton, *Promise*, 129-130.

<sup>670</sup>Colin Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, 229. In this book Gunton has developed the concept of ‘relation-in-otherness’ as ontologically rooted in a Christian doctrine of the Trinity (cf. for e.g., 177, 196, 205-206, 212, 215, 229-231).

<sup>671</sup>Gunton, *Promise*, 134; cf. 134-135. It is interesting that while Sanders seems to be aware of Gunton’s and Jenson’s work (he quotes from Gunton’s *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* where Gunton argues the points noted above [*Risks*, 163]; he quotes from Jenson’s *Triune Identity* in support of the divine relationality [*Risks*, 145]), he never appeals to them for a more explicit model of Trinity-providence relations.

<sup>672</sup>As Sanders repeatedly emphasises, ‘God has undertaken a project, and it is only from within this project in which God is related to us that we know God at all’ (*Risks*, 38).

people in the trajectory of Jesus. Jesus points us toward the future that the Father wants to establish. Christology informs eschatology.<sup>673</sup>

Moreover, 'the time until the eschaton is a time of the Holy Spirit; the Spirit tries different things in history to accomplish the divine purpose.'<sup>674</sup> From this brief account, it seems one may conclude that the character of Jesus forms the *structure* for the Father's providential care, and the Holy Spirit provides the *energising force* evoking and enabling human co-operation with this design.<sup>675</sup> One must conclude, however, that although Sanders clearly intends to relate the Trinity to providence, he fails to develop this relation in any detail. He might, for example, have made use of Gunton's model of providence. He 'suggests that we conceive of providence chiefly in terms of two models: the Son as the giver of structure, and the Holy Spirit as the one who gives the world space to become within, but not apart from, that structuring.'<sup>676</sup> This amounts to a delegation of providential tasks. The *unity* of the divine acts *ad extra* finds its source in the Father's will and from the execution of that will by the Father's 'two hands.' The *distinction* of those divine acts *ad extra* consists in the fact that the Father initiates, and sends; the Son provides structure and salvation; the Spirit enables and perfects.<sup>677</sup>

Another question for Sanders is as follows: Is it enough to say that the inner-trinitarian community, as such and as explained by Sanders, is the model of love relations for humans? While such an assertion does highlight the *unity* and *mutuality* that obtains among the trinitarian persons, does it pay enough attention to the *distinction* reflected in the *threeness* of the trinitarian ontology? One wonders, for example, if the differentiated roles of the economic Trinity might imply a kind of

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<sup>673</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 233.

<sup>674</sup>Sanders, *Risks*, 233.

<sup>675</sup>Sanders equates 'enabling or prevenient grace' with the work of the Holy Spirit (Sanders, *Risks*, 245). This is a common conception in Wesleyan-Arminian circles. Cf. for e.g., H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1988), 430, 431-436.

<sup>676</sup>Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, Edinburgh Studies in Constructive Theology (Edinburgh, U.K.: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 192.

<sup>677</sup>Gunton, *Triune Creator*, 10.

uniqueness of the trinitarian persons in their relations both *ad intra* and *ad extra*, such that this uniqueness becomes the ground for working out a trinitarian metaphysics of personhood which in turn accords *love*, as the central quality of the trinitarian relations, a *threefold dimension*. In other words, *love*, as a *way of relating* is of the same *quality* whether shared among the trinitarian persons or between the trinitarian persons and humans, but the *expression* of this love can take different *forms*, which in turn help to define the trinitarian persons' relations to the world and, therefore, the unique identity of each of the trinitarian persons in the immanent Trinity.

For example, one could think of the love of the Father for the Son, Spirit and world as being expressed in creating the world and in *sending* the Son and *giving* the Spirit; of the Son's love for the Father, the Spirit and the world as expressed in his roles in creating and sustaining the world and in his *taking human form* and living in the power of the Spirit; and of the love of the Spirit for the Father, Son and world as expressed in his *equipping* and *sanctifying* work in the church, *sustaining* creation, and in *enabling* unity-in-distinction both in inner-trinitarian relations and in human-Trinity relations. Such a view of the Trinity's relation to the world would respect the actual way the Bible speaks of the trinitarian persons' relations to the world, and would allow Sanders to maintain 'personhood' as the ultimate ontological category of the Trinity and open love as the expression of that personhood, with both categories defined as openly relational and community-engendering. In light of the fact that Sanders never reveals his particular model of the Trinity, such an approach would seem to satisfy his intent in referring to the Trinity, and yet not require him to move beyond a trinitarian way of speaking, that is to the development of a particular model of the Trinity.

These examples of trinitarian ontologies are intended to illustrate that Sanders had several models of Trinity-world relations at his disposal which would have made his appeal to the Trinity's connection to providence correspond more explicitly to the concrete roles played by the trinitarian persons in the economy. It may be the case that, due to Sanders' failure to develop more fully his appeal to the concrete way the trinitarian persons actually relate to the world, his use of a trinitarian ontology ends in an abstraction about the single divine characteristic of mutual, reciprocal

relationality. Miroslav Volf suggests that ‘proposals about the relation between the Trinity and human communities, though significant, are of limited value because they remain at the level of overly diffuse generalities, say about “plurality-in-unity”, the dialectic of “one and many”, or the balance between “relationality and otherness.”’<sup>678</sup> Volf similarly critiques Colin Gunton’s analysis of ‘the relation between one and many’ for paying ‘too little attention to the concrete Trinitarian narrative of the historical self-donation of God.’<sup>679</sup> Jenson’s caution against the medieval reduction of the Trinity to an undifferentiated “monotheism” applies here, as well.<sup>680</sup> He suggests instead that Christians remain faithful to

the kinds of trinitarian discourse developed in the New Testament and in the immediately subsequent period [and which] have continued through the history of the church. . . . Christians [thus] bespeak God in a triune coordinate system; they speak *to* the Father, *with* the Son, *in* the Spirit, and only so bespeak *God*. Indeed, they live in a sort of temporal space defined by these coordinates, and just and only so live ‘in God.’<sup>681</sup>

With a similar interest in giving the concrete expressions of the trinitarian relations to the world theological priority, Miroslav Volf depicts the doctrine of the Trinity as ‘the doctrinal expression of the narrative of the Triune God’s engagement with humanity.’<sup>682</sup> While it seems to be a sound methodological decision by Sanders, Volf and Jenson (given their view of scripture) to assign hermeneutical priority to how the Trinity has actually decided to act in the world in creation, providence and redemption, Colin Gunton rightly cautions against focusing on an economic Trinity to the exclusion of an immanent Trinity, a move which could result

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<sup>678</sup>Volf, ‘The Trinity is our Social Program,’ 412.

<sup>679</sup>Volf, ‘The Trinity is our Social Program,’ 421, n. 40.

<sup>680</sup>Cf. Jenson’s account of how the ascription to the ‘whole Trinity’ of all the divine “works *ad extra*” resulted in a loss of the distinct roles played by the trinitarian persons in each work, so that eventually it was ‘no longer necessary [to make] any necessary connection between the trinitarian persons and roles or structures of saving history’ (*The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel* [Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1982], 126, 127).

<sup>681</sup>Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 47.

<sup>682</sup>Volf, ‘The Trinity is Our Social Program,’ 423, n. 59.



in a collapse of the world into God.<sup>683</sup> For that reason he suggests the incorporation of a dialectical approach in understanding the Trinity's relation to the world, one in which the presupposed doctrine of the Trinity mutually influences the doctrine of the incarnation of Christ--a combination of a bottom-up and top-down approach in doctrinal construction.<sup>684</sup>

### **INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF THE 'RISK' MODEL**

Sanders model of providence pictures God truly *with* humans in the most intimate and interactive of ways (through the Spirit and the Son). And since God is still creating history in collaboration with humans, the actual shape of historical experience can be as innovative (new) as human imagination can make it, although God's overall goal will always guide it toward the relational and self-giving character of the inner-trinitarian love as definitively revealed in Jesus Christ.

This model of providence, therefore, accords meaning to human activity in the following ways: it shifts a good deal of both responsibility and glory to human actions; it makes them co-creators of their own destiny, rather than mere participants in God's history with the world.

Although he does not develop the link between providence and the doctrine of God as Trinity in detail, Sanders has at least attempted to give recognition to the possibility that, if the Christian God is triune, then this might make some difference in how one views providence. It is clear, however, that even an openness model of the Trinity does not of itself guarantee that a trinitarian God's relations *ad extra* will take on unique features *because* that God is trinitarian, anymore than the *ad extra* relations of Helm's trinitarian God required new ways of conceptualising providence.

Even though Sanders raises the issue of the relation between Trinity and providence, he does so only in order to *illustrate* the relationality of God's *essence*. He does not use the triune character of the Trinity in order to *define* the essence. Since Sanders claims he is focusing on the actions of the economic Trinity, one might have expected him to give a more detailed account of the differentiated roles

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<sup>683</sup>Gunton, Promise, xvii-xviii.

<sup>684</sup>Gunton, Christ and Creation, 75-76.

of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He seems to treat these differentiated roles, paradigmatically revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ, as the same necessary and differentiated roles which make possible *human* fellowship with the Father (through the Son and in the Spirit). This trinitarian metaphysics then becomes the context of meaning *in* which and *for* which God's providence works.

What Sanders has not done is to show the significance of the different ways Father, Son and Holy Spirit are persons in relation to the world. He has not shown how the trinitarian love might possess unique features reflective of the uniqueness of the trinitarian persons. He fails to mention how the trinitarian personhood and inner-trinitarian love may need to be understood as expressive of an ontology on a different level than human personhood and love. And he has not demonstrated what, if any, significance the uniqueness of the Father's fatherhood, the Son's sonship, and the Spirit's unifying presence<sup>685</sup> might have for providence and redemption. This latter question is especially important in light of the biblical teaching that it was the Son, not the Father or Spirit who became incarnate and is the one through whom and for whom the world was created.<sup>686</sup>

In fact, Sanders continues in the tradition of considering the trinitarian works *ad extra* as being the undifferentiated work of the Trinity as such. By restricting his attention to the love the trinitarian Persons have in common, and to the kind of love the Trinity as the one godhead exercises in God's relation to the world, Sanders has not explored the significance of the different roles played by the trinitarian persons in the economy and what this might imply about a trinitarian metaphysics. There is no *essential* (logical) connection between God as *Trinity* and God's relational love *ad extra*, and hence very little explicit connection between God as *Trinity* and risky providence.

It looks, therefore, as if Sanders has derived two main contiguous ideas from the revelation of how God has actually decided to relate to the world: on the one

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<sup>685</sup>Colin Gunton, for example, argues that Western trinitarian theology has tended to lose sight of the importance of the distinct personhood of the Spirit, as reflected in its stress on the Holy Spirit being 'the spirit of Jesus.' He insists that the distinct personhood of the Spirit is important if one is to preserve his 'distinctive function . . . [of] bring[ing] other persons into relationship while maintaining their otherness' (*Promise*, 133).

<sup>686</sup>Col. 1:16-17 RSV.

hand, God's openness, and on the other hand, the triuneness of God's being. However, he relates the concept of triuneness only superficially to the principle of openness, since his single focus is on the reciprocal relationality between divine sovereignty and human freedom.

There seem to be two questions raised by Sanders' appeal to a trinitarian metaphysics. First, is the nature of God's character as personal, relational and open love simply a datum of revelation, or is there a more explicit connection between these characteristics and the trinitarian ontology? Second, beyond supporting the concept of God's *interactive* love, is there any significance for *providence* in the fact that God is a Trinity? These questions will be kept in mind as Pannenberg's and Moltmann's models of providence are reviewed in the next chapter.

### CONCLUSION

These two models of providence ('risky' and 'risk-free') are divided by the way they answer a basic distinguishing question: What part, relative to each other, do God and humans play in determining the outcome of events, and what does this say about God's goal for creation? Each author is arguing, not that his suggested resolution of these underlying problems answers all the questions, only that his particular model provides the most coherent (and therefore most plausible) set of arguments for the biblical data with which they work.

Wiles and Gilkey, in the methodology they used in constructing their doctrines of providence, might be labelled revisionist theologians. Helm and Sanders, on the other hand, adopt a fairly traditional hermeneutic of scripture as they work to retain a doctrine of providence. Helm restates the traditional doctrine, hoping in the process to make explicit what he takes to be its inner coherence and hence its plausibility. Sanders works from a traditional Arminian position, which he then pushes in new directions.

Although the models of providence of Wiles, Gilkey, and Sanders would all qualify under the rubric of 'risk' models, they differ in the way they understand God's presence with us, and the way in which (or the means by which) God creates new meaning in history and transforms humans.

Even though, in Sanders' risk model, God is personally present and active in and to humans (especially believers), his action is still to a great degree hidden behind the scenes--as it was in Wiles' and Gilkey's models.

It would seem, therefore, that the risk models of providence invite Wiles' criticism that life is too ambiguous to be able to claim categorically God is *here*, or God did *that*. However, Nancey Murphy has argued that such claims can be plausible (and rational) if one already has in place a doctrine (a meaning-making structure or model) which leads one to interpret an event as having providential meaning.<sup>687</sup> In fact, it would be the doctrine itself (in this case, providence) which *enables* one to see the providential hand of God in the event. This need not be a case of vicious circular reasoning if one has good reasons for holding such a doctrine. For these models such ambiguity is a necessary part of the context which makes human life possible. Often it is only *after* some decision has been made, or some event has occurred, that one becomes aware of an emerging pattern of meaning--which, nevertheless, must remain a corrigible conclusion. Helm's model, of course, must conclude that a completed event occurs according to God's ordination of it. There remains, however, room for epistemic ignorance (and humility) in Helm's model because one never has access to the whole picture.

Thus, God is "present" in each of these models in the sense of forming an integral part of the meaning-making matrix on the ontological level and, to one degree or another, on the personal level. It would seem, for example, that only in the broadest sense of 'personal' can God be understood as present in Wiles' model. God is present in a more individualised manner in Gilkey's model since the 'lure' is tailor-made to each person's particular circumstance in any given decision. God is more personally present in Sanders' model, at least with Christians, but it must be said that God's prevenient presence to the non-Christian world (through the Holy Spirit)<sup>688</sup> is more nearly like that of Wiles' general preservation and Gilkey's lure.

The fact that Sanders' model allows for occasional direct actions of God in the events which shape human lives, creates an imbalance in his model. Gilkey's

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<sup>687</sup>Cf. Murphy, 'Does Prayer Make a Difference?', in Cosmos as Creation: Theology and Science in Consonance, ed. Ted Peters (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 235-245.

<sup>688</sup>Cf. Sanders, Risks, 245-246.

model avoids this because his God is even more self-limited than Sanders', and Wiles' maintains an even more uniform balance because of the "distance" God maintains from "interfering" in his creation. Helm's model also maintains a uniform balance, but precisely because God is in control of all details. One might point out here that Wiles' view of personal providence is the most attenuated of the theologians under consideration, while Sanders' is perhaps the most interactive. Helm's focus on God's unilateral and omnicausal relation with humanity, while maintaining the distinction between the two, tends to minimise the sense of personal interaction between God and humans.

In Helm's no-risk model God is present *in* and *through* humans in the sense of creating and sustaining the matrix of meaning (which *includes* humans) and then presenting knowledge of the *fact* of that matrix *to* us. This presentation itself, and the human response to it, constitutes an integral part of the matrix. In Sanders' risk model, God is present in the sense of sustaining the necessary conditions for being and action, and then engaging humans in creating meaning with him through their contributions to his project.

While the purpose of this thesis has precluded extensive engagement with the debate between theological determinists and free-will theists, it has been noted for two reasons. First, this difference of opinion figures prominently in the history of the debate surrounding differing models of providence, and the choice made for one side or the other results in significantly different views about the nature of the meaning of human life and history. Second, since these two positions are usually represented by theologians who hold to a doctrine of the Trinity, it was thought important to ask why they do not more explicitly integrate the two doctrines. Given the stated norm (scripture) used in both models, and because each understands Christology to be the norm for both God's providential presence and work in the world and for the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, this seems to be a logical question.

The nature of the debate between the two models leads to two important conclusions about the impact of their methodological focus on their doctrines of providence. First, the fact that these two models both focus primarily on the problem of defining God's sovereignty as the most important issue in a doctrine of providence

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helps to account for the restriction of their attention to the issue of the nature and effectiveness of God's creative goal (as expressed through his decrees or strategy). This problem requires, in turn, that they give special attention to the nature of God's *attributes*, and therefore to the matter of God's *essence*. Whether God's essence is understood as a common essence shared by the three trinitarian Persons, or simply as the essence of the one Godhead, it is a *single essence* which receives attention as being relevant for a doctrine of providence.

Once the problem of the God-world relation is formulated in these terms, it then becomes necessary to find a way of reconciling those biblical representations of God's nature and activity which seem to place him in time and as changing his mind, and those which seem to indicate that he knows the end from the beginning and never changes his mind. The attempt to resolve this difficulty introduces a second way in which their methodology impacts their models of providence. It has become apparent that *what* one understands from the biblical data about God and God's providential relation to the world is as much a function of one's *theological* commitments as it is of one's attempt to read the scripture objectively. Whether one adopts a hermeneutic which privileges the exact language, or the anthropomorphic, the biblical data itself cannot determine this. Some extra-textual conceptual device must be employed in order to resolve the hermeneutical decision which lies behind a so-called 'plain' reading of scripture--since such a reading can result in either the timelessly eternal, immutable God of Helm, or the self-limited, open God of Sanders. Thus, the real debate between the models of providence represented by Helm and Sanders arises at the level of justifying a hermeneutic.

Both theologians seem to adopt a kind of transcendental approach in resolving this dispute. Helm asks the question: What must God, in eternity, be like in order to make possible some of the strong biblical claims about God's sovereignty over the world? This approach seems to imply that the question of first importance concerns the essence of the *immanent Trinity*, even though this question depends on a prior resolution of the "hermeneutical" question, that is, of how to prioritise the biblical references to the *economic Trinity's* character and attributes. Sanders asks the question: Given the self-limited way the *economic Trinity* appears to act in the world, what summary statement (model) best captures the overall evidence of that



working? Again, even though the hermeneutical question of prioritising scripture references to God must come first in the order of inquiry, the question requiring *logical* priority is that of God's attributes as they are expressed in his actions within the world. Stated another way, it becomes a question about the essence of the *economic Trinity*. Indirectly, therefore, the issue of the explicit relation of Trinity and providence seems to come to the fore, even though neither of these authors explores that connection in any detail.

This second effect of their methodology on their doctrine of providence may be summarised as follows. Such a "subsidiary" issue as the Trinity's relation to providence is left aside. For Helm and Sanders, whether God is thought of as an absolute, all-controlling sovereign, or as self-limiting his sovereignty, the general effect on providence will be the same whether God relates to the world as three persons or as one person. The work of the *trinitarian* persons, in either model, comes into the picture as an *illustration* of God's providential relation to the world only *after* the more fundamental issues concerned with essence are resolved. In giving so much attention to defining the *essence* of God, and to treating that essence as a *unity*, Helm and Sanders fail to take into account the full trinitarian character of God's relation to the world as reflected in the economy of salvation. This makes God as *Trinity* irrelevant to God's providential action. Thus, one is led to ask, can questions about the *essence* of the economic Trinity be divorced from questions about the economic Trinity's *activities*, and further, can the issue of the *trinitarian* essence and action be treated as if they are irrelevant to the kind of divine *sovereignty* God exercises?

These two doctrines of providence, while presenting two very different views of the God-world relation, each try to answer the questions, *what kind of meaning*, and *how is meaning* conferred on human actions (and therefore on history) by God's fundamental providential relation to human actions? This relation, and the meaning derived from it, is in turn defined according to one's view of the nature of the divine being.

The questions raised by Helm's and Sanders' lack of integration of Trinity and providence leads to a consideration of two theologians who make the Trinity and the Trinity's relation to the world the controlling criterion for all other doctrines

including their understanding of the attributes of God, and of how God is understood to relate to the world. Because of this different methodological approach, they logically are led to integrate providence and Trinity. Such an approach seems to be a break with tradition. In light of the four views of providence explored so far, it would seem that one would have to have some compelling reason to begin a study of providence from a trinitarian perspective. This is what Pannenberg and Moltmann are attempting to do. The next chapter will look at their reasons for doing so, and assess whether they facilitate the recovery of providence.

## CHAPTER 4

### TRINITARIAN DOCTRINES OF PROVIDENCE: WOLFHART PANNENBERG AND JÜRGEN MOLTSMANN

#### INTRODUCTION

The survey of Helm's and Sanders' models of providence in the previous chapter led to questions about whether the relational *essence* of the Trinity can be divorced from a consideration of the Trinity's *activities* and further, can the issue of the *trinitarian* essence and action be treated as if irrelevant to the kind of divine sovereignty God exercises. Sanders clearly thinks the trinitarian essence *ad intra* and activities *ad extra* mutually condition each other, even though he does not explore the link. As Gerald O'Collins points out, 'patristic and subsequent elaboration of trinitarian teaching' sought to answer the question

about the absolute mystery of the Godhead in its eternal, divine life . . . . [t]hrough the 'economy' or history of salvation, initiated in the OT and fulfilled in the NT with the mission of the Son and the sending of the Holy Spirit . . . . From describing the 'economic' Trinity as experienced in the history of salvation, they moved to say something about the 'immanent' Trinity or the life of the tripersonal God in itself.<sup>689</sup>

Helm treats the divine essence as undifferentiated in its relation to the work of divine providence and as unaffected by what happens in the world, even in the incarnation. Moreover, Helm says the incarnation occurred *only* because of the fall, and that therefore Christ's death is only 'exemplarist' and 'substitutionary.'<sup>690</sup> If,

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<sup>689</sup>Gerald O'Collins, S.J., The Tripersonal God: Understanding and Interpreting the Trinity (Mahway, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999), 5; cf. *ibid.*, 141-142.

<sup>690</sup>Helm, The Providence of God, in *Contours of Christian Theology*, series ed. Gerald Bray (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 100, 214.

however, as Helm himself points out, it is impossible to separate providence and redemption,<sup>691</sup> one wonders if the christological focus of redemption and the Spirit's traditional association with the creation, sanctification and mission of the church might not open the door to seeing providence in a more explicitly trinitarian light. Craig Keen argues that christology is precisely the dimension of the Trinity-world relation which brings into question 'the closure, the quarantine, that is suggested by the idea of the Supreme Being who cannot be affected' by the world. This 'closure' 'is transgressed by the doctrine of the enhypostaton; for in order for human being to enter radically into the outgoing person of the Son, God must be open.'<sup>692</sup>

This raises the question as to whether the role of the Logos is limited to the original creation and to providing salvation. Even in Helm's concept of the unitary, timeless act of creation, it would seem that a *continuing* role of the Logos in creation cannot be separated from his role in providing redemption. If this is the case, can one envision a more distinct and extensive role for the Son in God's creative and providential work? Further, can such an extension be applied to the Spirit's role in the economy? These are questions to be asked of Pannenberg and Moltmann in the present chapter.

Two key points in Pannenberg's and Moltmann's trinitarian theologies affect their doctrines of providence. First, because they begin with the presupposition that the primary basis for a trinitarian doctrine of providence lies in the work and relations of the economic Trinity, the following formula suggests itself: speculation about the identity and ontology of the trinitarian persons must derive from their actions in the economy and not from hypotheses about what it means for each to be person, or perfect, in a generic sense. This formula, constructed on this basis, provides the rationale for privileging a relational ontology of both divine and human identity. It also becomes the grammar for a trinitarian doctrine of providence.

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<sup>691</sup>Helm notes that providence includes common grace, special grace, predestination and the life and work of the church (Helm, *Providence*, 119, 214; cf. Gerald Bray's similar conclusion, *The Doctrine of God*, *Contours of Christian Theology*, ed. Gerald Bray [Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993], 141, 145, 146-147, 224).

<sup>692</sup>Craig Keen, 'The Transgression of the Integrity of God: The Trinity and the Hallowing of the Flesh,' *The Wesleyan Theological Journal* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 88; cf. *ibid.*, 73-98.

They agree with Karl Rahner's argument in support of this presupposition. If one were to accept that any one of the trinitarian Persons might have become incarnate,<sup>693</sup> 'then the fact of the incarnation of the Logos "reveals" properly nothing about the Logos *himself*, that is, about his own relative specific features within the divinity.'<sup>694</sup> Since it is already accepted that God is personal, the incarnation would reveal nothing about the 'special differentiation of [the trinitarian] persons.'<sup>695</sup> Thus, there would be no ontological connection between the *Son*'s incarnation and the Son's eternal identity as the *Son*. Rahner argues that even though the term "hypostasis" can be used of each divine person, it cannot be used univocally of each.<sup>696</sup> On the basis of this reasoning, he concludes that 'our sonship in grace' must have some unique connection to the Son, to 'the personal being which belongs exclusively to . . . the Father's Logos.' If this were not the case, then 'that which God is for us [in the economy] would tell us absolutely nothing about that which he is in himself, as triune.'<sup>697</sup> Therefore, Rahner states his now classic formula as follows: '*The "economic" Trinity is the "immanent" Trinity and the "immanent" Trinity is the "economic" Trinity.*'<sup>698</sup> As we shall see, Pannenberg and Moltmann will modify this formula somewhat, but they retain the essential identity of the "two trinities."

Second, when this rationale for both the uniqueness and unity of the trinitarian persons is given grammatical weight, then any work ascribed to them in the economy must in some way reflect their unique identities as the three-in-one God. This begins to come clear in Pannenberg's and Moltmann's insistence that the Son, through the Spirit, is the principle of otherness in the immanent Trinity, and is, therefore, the basis for created otherness. In this theological anthropology, therefore, humans are to be understood as created in the image of the Son.

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<sup>693</sup>Cf. Jenson's rejection of this idea (*Triune Identity*, 127).

<sup>694</sup>Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (Kent, UK: Burns and Oates, 1970), 28.

<sup>695</sup>Rahner, *Trinity*, 28.

<sup>696</sup>Rahner, *Trinity*, 29.

<sup>697</sup>Rahner, *Trinity*, 30.

<sup>698</sup>Rahner, *Trinity*, 22.

Troubled by the problems associated with the unrelated God of Classical Theism, Pannenberg and Moltmann are looking to a doctrine of the Trinity as a way of avoiding the “absence” of God and as a way of privileging the doctrine of the Trinity as the grammar of the Christian understanding of God.

Pannenberg, for example, has developed his theology of providence in a way which gives it a trinitarian focus by treating it as an aspect of a trinitarian doctrine of creation. Creation is given a trinitarian shape by the way in which it participates in and derives its identity from, the inner-trinitarian relations of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.<sup>699</sup> Jürgen Moltmann has not constructed a theology of providence in traditional terms, but he has developed a trinitarian metaphysics by which he defines God’s ongoing, creative and providential relation to the world. In both of these theologies of providence the larger concerns involve such themes as God as Trinity, the Trinity’s relation to history, and history’s relation to the future.<sup>700</sup>

### PANNENBERG: GOD AHEAD

Pannenberg accepts the critique of the God of Classical Theism noted above (Chapter One). He feels that the classical idea of God as one person is ‘an anthropomorphic idea . . . and it rightly fell to the attacks of atheism.’<sup>701</sup> He also rejects an understanding of God’s relation to the world in which God’s omnipotent providence means his tyranny over the creature.<sup>702</sup> At the same time, however, he feels that the Christian tradition provides us with the resources for the most illuminating paradigm for understanding human experience of the world. These two

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<sup>699</sup>Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans; Edinburgh, U.K.: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1994). Hereafter abbreviated as Pannenberg, *Systematic* 2.

<sup>700</sup>Another trinitarian model of providence is that of Colin Gunton (*The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, Edinburgh Studies in Constructive Theology [Edinburgh, U.K.: Edinburgh University Press, 1998], see esp. chap. 8).

<sup>701</sup>Pannenberg, ‘Theta Phi Talkback Session with Wolfhart Pannenberg,’ *The Asbury Theological Journal* 46, no. 2 (Fall 1991): 39.

<sup>702</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Edinburgh, UK: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1991), 388 (hereafter abbreviated as Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1).



convictions play a significant role in his theological work of constructing a systematic theology.

Pannenberg's assertion that theology is the science of God encapsulates both his theological agenda and method. If all truth is ultimately one,<sup>703</sup> then the explanatory model which makes most intelligible all the sources of data in human experience of the world will commend itself as the most adequate interpretation of that experience. It is Pannenberg's thesis that Christian theology provides the resources for such a model, and in this way the Christian doctrine of God remains eminently relevant.<sup>704</sup>

Because Pannenberg is first of all a theologian, his task is to give a coherent account of the Christian faith. This means that his doctrine of God as 'all-determining reality'<sup>705</sup> allows (and requires) him to use his theological model to integrate philosophical insights and 'the scientific understanding of the world into the Christian view of it as God's creation.'<sup>706</sup>

However, the provisional truth claims of Christian theology in the present await the completion of 'salvation history' for their full clarification and validation,<sup>707</sup> and this makes history (and specifically, the history of religions) the locus of the debate about the existence and nature of God. For this reason, a key point of interest is God's revealing and consummating activity in the world through his ongoing providential creation of, co-operation with, and governing of, his creation.

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<sup>703</sup>Pannenberg, Systematic 1: 19.

<sup>704</sup>Cf. Pannenberg, 'Toward a Theology of the History of Religions,' chap. in Basic Questions in Theology, vol. 2, trans. George H. Kehm, The Library of Philosophy and Theology, eds. John McIntyre, and Ian T. Ramsey (London, UK: SCM Press Ltd., 1971), 82.

<sup>705</sup>Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, vol. 3, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Edinburgh, UK: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1998), 504 (hereafter abbreviated as Pannenberg, Systematic 3). God as 'all-determining reality' designates the biblical God who is the *source* of all that is (Systematic 3:504, n. 183; cf. *ibid.*, 505), and does not imply that God arbitrarily determines the exact shape of the being and experience of every created entity.

<sup>706</sup>Pannenberg, Systematic 2: 60, n. 151; cf. xiv, 59-60, 71, 83.

<sup>707</sup>Pannenberg, An Introduction to Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Edinburgh, UK: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1991) 18 (hereafter abbreviated as Pannenberg, Introduction).

Although the focus of this study is on Pannenberg's doctrine of providence, because he links so intrinsically all of God's action in the world to the relations and activities of the trinitarian persons, it will be necessary to first establish the main contours of Pannenberg's treatment of the Trinity.

### ***THE GOD-WORLD RELATION: A TRINITARIAN MODEL***

Pannenberg, in common with Moltmann, uses a model of the Trinity in order to understand how God and the world relate.<sup>708</sup> He explains as follows: 'The activity of the Son through the Spirit of God comprises the entire economy of God's action in creating, reconciling, and uniting the world of creatures to himself.'<sup>709</sup> While the Bible 'presupposes a real relation of God to time,' this requires that God not be 'understood as undifferentiated identity but as intrinsically differentiated unity. But this demands the doctrine of the Trinity.'<sup>710</sup> While Pannenberg agrees that Tillich was correct to stress that eternity is neither timeless, nor opposed to either time or the sequence of 'divided moments of time,' Tillich lacked the trinitarian theology of Barth in order to also maintain 'the difference of the eternal God from the temporality of creatures,' and also 'the movement of their incorporation into God's eternal present.' He explains as follows:

We can do this with the help of the unity of the immanent and economic Trinity. If the doctrine of the immanent Trinity is the basis of the idea of plurality in the life totality of the one God which is eternally present to him, the doctrine of the working of the trinitarian persons in the economy of salvation is the basis of the existence of a plurality of creatures and their incorporation into the life of God for participation in his eternal glory.<sup>711</sup>

Admittedly these are rather densely packed statements and require further explanation.

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<sup>708</sup>Cf. Pannenberg, *Introduction*, 67; idem, *Systematic* 2: 59.

<sup>709</sup>Pannenberg, *Introduction*, 68.

<sup>710</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 405.

<sup>711</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 407.

## God as Trinity: the Source and Shape of the Doctrine

The details of Pannenberg's treatment of the Trinity are complex, and are aimed at answering many problems associated with traditional versions of the doctrine. I will here take a summary approach with the intent of highlighting those aspects of the doctrine that bear particularly on his doctrine of providence.

Pannenberg agrees with Wiles in rejecting the idea that the Christian concept of God as Trinity can be derived straightforwardly from the Bible.<sup>712</sup> Nevertheless, he finds in the New Testament account of the relations of the Son to the Father and the Spirit a compelling case for developing a doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>713</sup>

He begins his delineation of the Trinity with an account of the relations and distinctions of the trinitarian persons as manifested in the economy.<sup>714</sup> He concludes that

one can know the intertrinitarian distinctions and relations, the inner life of God, only through the revelation of the Son, not through the different spheres of the operation of the one God in the world. Only subsequently can one relate specific aspects of the unity of the divine working in the world to trinitarian distinctions that are known already.<sup>715</sup>

Discussion of the unity of the essence of deity must follow, therefore, an analysis of the relations of the revealed Trinity.<sup>716</sup> This entails that the differentiated 'unity of the essence may be found only in their concrete life relations.'<sup>717</sup> Each person, in fact, 'is a catalyst of many relations,' and 'self-distinction does not mean exactly the same thing for each of the three persons.' The 'unity in distinction' can be seen in that the Son glorifies the Father, while the Spirit glorifies the Son, and through him, the Father.<sup>718</sup>

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<sup>712</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 268-272.

<sup>713</sup>Pannenberg, 'The Christian Vision of God: The New Discussion on the Trinitarian Doctrine,' *The Asbury Theological Journal* 46, no. 2 (Fall 1991): 28.

<sup>714</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: Chapter 5.

<sup>715</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 273; cf. *ibid.*, 299.

<sup>716</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 299.

<sup>717</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 335; cf. *ibid.*, 335-336, 333.

<sup>718</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 320, 321; cf. *ibid.*, 347.

Pannenberg is particularly anxious to stress the mutuality of the intra-trinitarian relations, something he thinks Moltmann has failed to consistently maintain.<sup>719</sup> Pannenberg rejects the ascription of being or deity to either the Son or Spirit on the basis of their origination in (or from) the Father--rather, the Son and Spirit are ontologically equal to the Father.<sup>720</sup> Of key importance in this stress on the mutuality of divine persons as revealed in the economy, is the desire to bring into focus the subjectivity of each of the three persons--an idea that carries special significance in developing a trinitarian doctrine of creation and providence. In so doing he can point out that they are three centres of consciousness, and that each plays a distinct role in each of the divine works in the economy.

On the basis of these concrete relations, as revealed in the economy, Pannenberg then defines the essence of the one God as constituted by the three persons and as forming 'a single constellation.' This essence is the 'field of the infinite': 'Materially, however, the specific form of the existence of God as Father, Son, and Spirit is identical with the unlimited field of God's nonthematic presence in his creation.'<sup>721</sup> This also means, however, that the divine essence itself only exists as a result of the relations of the Father, Son, and Spirit--it is not 'some reality in itself to be set apart or even prior to the personal aspect'<sup>722</sup> of the Father, Son, and Spirit.

In spite of Pannenberg's concern to avoid the impersonal categories of classical theism when referring to God, and instead to return to the personal language of the Bible, speaking of the essence of God as the 'field of the infinite,' or as a 'field of power,' has led to charges that Pannenberg has compromised the personal nature of God.<sup>723</sup> Pannenberg himself admits the impersonal nature of the concept of

<sup>719</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 334.

<sup>720</sup>Pannenberg, 'Christian Vision,' 32.

<sup>721</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 359.

<sup>722</sup>Pannenberg, 'Talkback,' 39.

<sup>723</sup>The reason for this concern can be illustrated with the following statement: 'The Spirit of God can be understood as the supreme field of power that pervades all of creation. Each finite event or being is to be considered as a special manifestation of that field, and their movements are responsive to its forces' (Pannenberg, *Introduction* 46; cf. *ibid.*, 49). Philip Clayton says the impersonal aspect of

the divine essence as such. This one divine essence that makes for the unity of God is not personal by itself, but personal only as it becomes manifested in each of the three persons. Correspondingly, each of the personal manifestations is characterized by a movement beyond itself, and this is constitutive of the personal mystery in each of them.<sup>724</sup>

This impersonal language, however, may be unavoidable since Pannenberg's project requires him to attempt metaphysical speculations regarding the nature of God's relation to the universe that find some resonance with scientific understandings of the world. This is a reflection of Pannenberg's attempt to bring theology into conversation with the sciences, in this instance through the adoption of field theory for theological purposes.<sup>725</sup> At the same time, however, Pannenberg attempts to mitigate this impersonal language by his understanding of the dual aspect of spirit as both the essence of God and as the personal Holy Spirit--an idea which will be developed below in the discussion of the different roles of the persons of the Trinity in the economy.

### The Trinity-World Relation

Traditionally, the Father functions as the single source of deity in the intra-trinitarian relations, and as the Creator of the world. Pannenberg rejects the first notion and modifies the latter. The Father is Creator only in participation with the Son and Spirit, although the uniqueness of the relations within the Trinity reserves the sole monarchy of the Godhead (and ultimate lordship of the Kingdom) for the Father.

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the Trinity in Pannenberg's model agrees with his own thesis that not all of God is conscious ('Pluralism, Idealism, Romanticism: Untapped Resources for a Trinity in Process,' in *Trinity in Process: A Relational Theology of God*, eds. Joseph A. Bracken, S.J., and Marjorie H. Suchocki [New York, US: The Continuum Publishing Co., 1997], 145, n. 39). Cf. Gregory R. Peterson's critique of the impersonal idea of 'identifying God as an all-determining field' ('*What Shall We Make of Wolfhart Pannenberg? A Symposium on Beginning with the End: God, Science, and Wolfhart Pannenberg*' [ed. Carol Rausch Albright and Joel Haugen]: "Where do We go From Here?," *Zygon* 34, no. 1 [March 1999]: 146).

<sup>724</sup>Pannenberg, 'Christian Vision,' 36; cf. idem, *Systematic* 1: 383.

<sup>725</sup>Cf. Pannenberg, *Systematic* 2: 79-84.



Pannenberg argues for a model of trinitarian creation in which the Son has a *subjective* role as well as the Father, a role which instantiates ‘the contingency and historicity of the reality that results from God’s creative action.’ The Son is ‘the principle of otherness’ and ‘interrelation,’ both in the Trinity and in creation.<sup>726</sup> The Son, therefore, ‘is the origin as well as the consummator of creation’:

He is its origin as his self-distinction from the Father becomes the generative principle of all the reality that is distinct from God, both in that distinction from God and in relation to other creatures. Here is the basis of the particularity and independence of creaturely existence. The Son is the consummator, however, inasmuch as all things will be gathered up into one in him.<sup>727</sup>

But this gathering up into the Son will not negate the creatures’ distinct identities: first, because of the Son’s instantiation of their distinction from God; and second, because of the Spirit’s enabling of their ‘participation in the filial relation of Jesus Christ to the Father.’<sup>728</sup>

The understanding of the Son’s subjective self-distinction from the Father implies, however, his continuing relation to the Father, and therefore in the creative act he freely moves out of the ‘unity of the divine life’ in obedience to the Father, which means he ‘is not alone the Creator of the world.’ In this way ‘the Father thus acts as Creator through the Son.’<sup>729</sup>

In this way ‘creation is a free act of God as an expression of the freedom of the fatherly goodness that in the Son accepts the possibility and the existence of a creation distinct from himself, and of the freedom of the Spirit who links the two in free agreement.’<sup>730</sup> In this trinitarian view of creation, ‘the Spirit of God is the life-giving principle, to which all creatures owe life, movement, and activity.’<sup>731</sup> As the

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<sup>726</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 2: 27, 28, 32, 22-23, 24, 29; cf. Pannenberg, ‘The Doctrine of Creation and Modern Science,’ in *Cosmos as Creation: Theology and Science in Consonance*, ed. Ted Peters [Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989], 162; cf. *ibid.*, 175).

<sup>727</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 3: 454.

<sup>728</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 3: 454.

<sup>729</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 2: 29-30.

<sup>730</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 2: 30.

<sup>731</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 2: 76.



medium of the fellowship of the Father and Son, the Spirit is also the medium of creaturely participation with God.<sup>732</sup> In this way ‘God is himself present in his creation.’<sup>733</sup>

While Pannenberg rejects the Augustinian and Western view of the Spirit’s relation to the Father and Son as only in terms of origin, he does maintain that *relationally* ‘the Spirit originates and proceeds from the Father.’<sup>734</sup> This does not appear to be an outright rejection of the notion ‘origin,’ but a shift of emphasis to the mutuality of relations. In keeping with the scriptural language describing these relations, Pannenberg avoids further speculation on the idea of origins. As he says, the trinitarian persons simply are what they are in their relations to one another. On this view the Spirit is both received by the Son, mediates the Son’s relation to the Father, and is also sent by Father and Son to believers. Thus, ‘*all* sonship [including Jesus] . . . rests on the working of the Spirit.’<sup>735</sup>

It becomes important at this point to clarify the fact that Pannenberg uses the idea of spirit in two senses: first, as a name for the divine essence as such<sup>736</sup>; second, as the name of the third person of the Trinity, an individual hypostasis equal in deity and personhood to that of the Father and Son. Only as these two senses are kept distinct can confusion be avoided in understanding the Spirit’s role in Pannenberg’s concept of the nature and work of the Trinity in the economy. Failure to recognise this distinction may account, in part, for the charges of impersonalism noted above.

Spirit (or ‘Spirit of love,’ or ‘love’) as used in the first sense, is the name for the *relationship*, through the medium of which, the trinitarian persons perichoretically relate to each other. It is this sense that suggests the impersonal aspect of Spirit. This divine life, field, essence or Spirit is not a substance, but is a life-giving force, and as such arises from the relation of the persons of the Father,

<sup>732</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 316; cf. *ibid.*, 266, 267.

<sup>733</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 414.

<sup>734</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 317, 318.

<sup>735</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 266 (italics mine); cf. *ibid.*, 319, n. 18, 268.

<sup>736</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 383; cf. *ibid.*, 427, 428.

Son, and Spirit. It does not exist in its own right; it is not a fourth entity or person over against the three.<sup>737</sup>

The Spirit links the 'future to the present' and 'the eschatological consummation itself is ascribed to the Spirit.'<sup>738</sup> The Spirit both preserves life and maintains the identity of the creature, and will also transform the creature so that it can participate in God's eternity in its creaturely identity.<sup>739</sup> Thus, Pannenberg can 'view the creative working of the Spirit as the field of force of the divine future from which events proceed contingently.'<sup>740</sup>

It is this aspect of Spirit that Pannenberg labels 'as the supreme field of power that pervades all of creation,' and as such is 'the power of love that lets the other be.'<sup>741</sup> In this way Pannenberg adopts the concept of field theories in physics as a way of conceptualising the idea of God as Spirit. He argues that because field phenomena are 'independent of matter and [are] defined only by their relations to space or space-time' they can be used to 'interpret the idea of God as Spirit.'<sup>742</sup> Polkinghorne, however, points out that Pannenberg adopts this notion too simplistically, that the idea of 'energy' is not simply 'a kind of *spiritual* concept,' and that Pannenberg's 'notion of a field's immateriality clearly is not correct.'<sup>743</sup> Polkinghorne suggests instead, that Pannenberg's desire to see in physics a move toward spiritualization<sup>744</sup> might better be found 'in chaos theory and complexity theory' which have 'led to a recognition that notions of energetic causality need supplementing by notions of a kind of pattern-forming causality.'<sup>745</sup> One suspects,

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<sup>737</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 425-426; cf. *ibid.*, 383, 428.

<sup>738</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 3: 552, 553; cf. *idem*, *Systematic* 2: 98, 100, 101-102, 108.

<sup>739</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 3: 554-555, 606-607, 622-626.

<sup>740</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 2: 110.

<sup>741</sup>Pannenberg, *Introduction*, 46; *idem*, *Systematic* 1: 427.

<sup>742</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 382.

<sup>743</sup>Polkinghorne, 'Wolfhart Pannenberg's Engagement with the Natural Sciences,' *Zygon* 34, no. 1 (March 1999), 154.

<sup>744</sup>Cf. Pannenberg, 'Doctrine of Creation,' 166.

<sup>745</sup>Polkinghorne, 'Pannenberg's Engagement,' 154.

however, that this kind of general, top-down notion of “‘active information’” would not satisfy Pannenberg’s desire to see God as creatively effecting particular providences. This was a problem that Wiles noted in relation to Arthur Peacocke’s use of this same idea of ‘active information.’<sup>746</sup>

Whatever one makes of Pannenberg’s attempt at correlation here, one benefit he seeks is an understanding of ‘the autonomy of the field. . . . The deity as field can find equal manifestation in all three persons’: the divine Persons ‘are simply manifestations and forms--eternal forms--of the one divine essence.’ Thus, ‘the specifically Christian version of the fact that the one God is the living God comes to expression in the *living fellowship* of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.’<sup>747</sup>

But Pannenberg also emphasises the second aspect of the concept of Spirit, that is, his personhood. The Spirit, therefore,

comes forth as a separate hypostasis as he comes over against the Son and the Father as the divine essence, common to both, which actually unites them and also attests and maintains their unity in face of their distinction. . . . As a hypostasis, however, the Spirit is distinct from both Father and Son. Hence he can be at work in creation and he can also be shed abroad in the hearts of believers as a gift.<sup>748</sup>

This dual role for the concept of Spirit, both as essence of love and as personal Holy Spirit, helps to explain how not only the Father, but also the Son and the Spirit (as hypostases), can each, equally, be subjects of the divine love and action in the economy of salvation. Since they do not have their existence and identity apart from one another, and yet subsist as three separate centres of consciousness, whatever one does they all participate in. Thus, Pannenberg can speak of their co-operation in their works *ad extra*.<sup>749</sup>

Since the creation of the world is an expression of the essence of the trinitarian God, and therefore of the free love that unites the Father, Son, and Holy

<sup>746</sup>Wiles, Chapter Two, above.

<sup>747</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 383 (italics mine).

<sup>748</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 429; cf. *ibid.*, 316, 383-384.

<sup>749</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 388.

Spirit,<sup>750</sup> all of the works of the Trinity express this differentiated unity of the divine essence, and as expressions of it, cannot be separated from it. While 'the kingdom of God in the world is certainly the kingdom of the Father,' this monarchy or 'absolute lordship . . . of the Father is mediated by the Son, who prepares the way for it by winning form for it in the life of creatures, and also by the Spirit, who enables creatures to honor God as their Creator by letting them share in the relation of the Son to the Father.'<sup>751</sup> Through this structure of cooperation the action of the triune persons can be ascribed to the one God.<sup>752</sup>

In this dual aspect of essence and persons, the divine action in the world amounts to 'the self-actualization of God in his relation to creation.'<sup>753</sup> The Son's self-distinction from, and obedience to the mission and sending of the Father, means that creation is appropriated to the Father, and mediated by the Son (as principle of distinction and structure of relation) and the Spirit (as life-giving power and means of continued existence).<sup>754</sup>

Pannenberg, by avoiding talk of intra-trinitarian relations in terms of origin from the Father, and by stressing the mutuality of these relations for the *constitution* of the three persons, is able to maintain their distinction as three persons with unique characteristics (and therefore as centres of consciousness and subjectivity), and yet they do not have these qualities apart from their relations with each other. Thus, the Father is Father only in relation to the Son; the Son is Son only in free self-distinction from, and obedience to the Father; the Spirit is Spirit only as he glorifies the Son and the Father.<sup>755</sup> In this set of relationships they form a differentiated unity which constitutes the single divine essence. With this model in the background, Pannenberg can then move on to explicate how the works of the Trinity *ad extra* ('as

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<sup>750</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 369.

<sup>751</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 388-389.

<sup>752</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 389.

<sup>753</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 386, cf. *ibid.*, 426.

<sup>754</sup>Cf. Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 313; and *idem*, *Systematic* 2: 6.

<sup>755</sup>Cf. Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 324-325. Insistence upon this inter-subjectivity of the divine persons is one way in which Pannenberg modifies Rahner's understanding of the "two" trinities (cf. Pannenberg, *ibid.*, 308).

Creator, Sustainer, Reconciler, and Consummator<sup>756</sup>) can be ascribed to the one God who exists and acts in three Persons.

This panentheistic model of the God-world relation carries overtones of making God dependent upon the world. For example, Pannenberg notes that identifying the immanent and economic trinities means that one ‘must constantly link the trinity in the eternal essence of God to his historical revelation, since revelation cannot be viewed as extraneous to his deity.’<sup>757</sup> Pannenberg insists, however, that the economic and immanent trinities not be so identified as to absorb ‘the immanent Trinity in the economic Trinity.’ He rejects the idea, therefore, of ‘a divine becoming in history, as though the trinitarian God were the result of history and achieved reality only with its eschatological consummation.’ Rather, ‘the eschatological consummation is only the locus of the decision that the trinitarian God is always the true God from eternity to eternity.’<sup>758</sup> In an important sense, while God did not need a world in order to complete his being or fulfil his love, the world, once it existed, becomes the locus for establishing the reality and deity of God.<sup>759</sup> Pannenberg further clarifies his meaning here by noting that the idea of ‘the futurity of God’s Kingdom’ does not imply ‘a development in God.’ While ‘the very essence of God implies time,’ God himself does not change.<sup>760</sup> Rather, it is ‘our understanding of God [that] changes.’<sup>761</sup>

### ***A TRINITARIAN MEDIATION OF PROVIDENCE***

Pannenberg’s structuring of his systematics around the central motif of the doctrine of God as Trinity entails that his doctrine of providence also comes under

<sup>756</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 2: 5.

<sup>757</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 328.

<sup>758</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 331.

<sup>759</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 59, 313; cf. idem, *Systematic* 2: 1; idem, *Systematic* 3: 540; cf. also Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1969), 55.

<sup>760</sup>Pannenberg, *Kingdom of God*, 62.

<sup>761</sup>Pannenberg, ‘A Theological Conversation with Wolfhart Pannenberg,’ *Dialog* 11, no. 4 (Autumn 1972): 294.

this rubric. Within that general structure, however, he then orients providence according to its relation with other key doctrines: creation, reconciliation, and consummation.

### **Situating and Defining the Doctrine of Providence**

The doctrine of providence in this schema is subsumed under the doctrine of continued creation,<sup>762</sup> and as such, is seen as the outworking of God's eternally creative,<sup>763</sup> preserving and overruling action under the conditions of time and space.<sup>764</sup> All of God's works manifest the characteristic of a continuing dynamic of coming-to-be. This dynamic results from the fact that from our perspective, God's creative act comes from the future. Thus, the future is both the realm of contingent possibility, and the direction of the arrival of God's in-breaking rule.<sup>765</sup> This ontological priority of the future, expressed in the formula, 'promise and fulfillment,'<sup>766</sup> also accounts for the forward direction of providence and history.

Pannenberg's situating of providence can be clarified by comparing it to Schleiermacher's. Pannenberg points out that in his own model, 'the relationship [of the world] to God is . . . shaped by the contingency of the divine act of creation at every moment of creaturely existence.' For Schleiermacher, however, it is shaped 'by the dependence of creaturely existence as a whole on an origin which is the basis of the whole nexus of nature. He thus subordinates the concept of creation to that of preservation,'<sup>767</sup> while Pannenberg subordinates 'preservation' to 'creation' by bringing the dynamic of creation into every present.

<sup>762</sup>Cf. Pannenberg, Introduction, 39-40.

<sup>763</sup>Cf. Pannenberg, Introduction, 41.

<sup>764</sup>Pannenberg, Systematic 2: 42.

<sup>765</sup>Pannenberg, Introduction, 49; idem, Systematic 1: 390; cf. *ibid.*, 419.

<sup>766</sup>Wolfhart Pannenberg, 'Redemptive Event and History,' chap. in Basic Questions in Theology, Collected Essays, vol. 1, trans. George H. Kehm (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1970), 19.

<sup>767</sup>Pannenberg, Systematic 1: 419.



Perhaps another reason for subsuming providence under a concept of continuing creation is the nature of God's motive in creating the world. God's freedom and motive of love in creating entails neither an overpowering emotion, nor simply 'love as caprice.' Because God exists in eternity as a Trinity of persons freely and mutually constituted by each other, and since this unity consists of freely given and received love, God is free to turn this love outwards towards the creature, without either needing the creature for the expression of this love,<sup>768</sup> nor without giving existence to the creature on the basis of a whim. From this perspective 'the freedom of the divine origin of the world on the one hand and God's holding fast to his creation on the other belong together,' since the latter idea of 'God's creative will constantly to preserve the world' also reflects a *faithfulness* to creation.<sup>769</sup> Thus, the divine freedom and the divine motive of love are part of the reason why Pannenberg develops a trinitarian doctrine of creation and also why he subsumes providence under creation--the divine trinitarian freedom is the source of contingency, newness, and history in creation, while the divine love (in its differentiated, trinitarian structure) preserves the creature in its uniqueness and independence.<sup>770</sup>

Although the doctrine of providence is subsumed under the doctrine of creation, this latter doctrine is itself subsumed under God's eternal decision and plan for creation.<sup>771</sup> Thus, providence (as preservation, co-operation and government) is one activity (or group of activities) that facilitates this overall plan and purpose for creation.

Pannenberg, like Wiles and Helm, sees God's creative action as 'a single act that embraces the whole cosmic process.'<sup>772</sup> But Pannenberg's reasons for holding this unity of divine action are different from those of Wiles, as is his understanding of God's relation to the 'many individual acts and phases.' Pannenberg is concerned to relate God's eternity to created time. Wiles has a more restrictive agenda, that is,

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<sup>768</sup>Cf. Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 391.

<sup>769</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 2: 19, 20.

<sup>770</sup>Pannenberg, 'Doctrine of Creation,' 162.

<sup>771</sup>Pannenberg, *Introduction*, 39-40; idem, *Systematic* 2: 7-8.

<sup>772</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 2: 34.

a concern to maintain the *uniformity* of God's action towards the world in the interests of fair play, creaturely independence and freedom, and divine non-culpability for evil. This *uniformity* differs from the *unity* in Pannenberg's model of the divine actions of creation, preservation, overruling and consummation,<sup>773</sup> because Wiles does not think of God as acting directly in the many subacts that make up the matrix of the world. Moreover, Pannenberg intends to show that, 'if creation comes to completion only with the world's reconciliation and redemption,' then this means that 'the Creator is allied to us in the battle to overcome evil and to reduce and heal suffering in the world.'<sup>774</sup> There is a sense in which creation will only be complete at the eschatological consummation. Therefore, the doctrine of providence, as the doctrine of God's ongoing relation to the universe in the present, embodies a creative element. For this reason Pannenberg can say that 'preservation goes with creation.' Preservation, thus defined, constitutes much more than the 'unchanging conservation of the forms of creaturely existence laid down at the first. It is a living occurrence, continued creation, a constantly new creative fashioning that goes beyond what was given existence originally.'<sup>775</sup> Thus, the differentiated *unity* of divine action in Pannenberg's model reflects the personal faithfulness of the inner-trinitarian relations in the Trinity's direct involvement with the events of the world, rather than the *uniformity* of inflexible laws of nature which blindly govern the development of life.

It becomes apparent from this scenario that the event of the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection is not the *addition* of a redemptive act in a universe gone wrong, but the event is redemptive precisely insofar as it manifests the origin, goal and fulfilment of God's creative purpose. There is, therefore, a structural unity between the divine creating, preserving, and overruling activity.

Although Pannenberg subsumes providence under a doctrine of creation, he does develop a distinct doctrine of providence, which he delineates as preservation, co-operation, and government (overruling).

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<sup>773</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 2: 34-35.

<sup>774</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 2: 173.

<sup>775</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 2: xvi, 34.

He gives the first element, *preservation*, a somewhat different content than it received in the classical understanding. There it referred to the 'preservation of the created world in its original order.'<sup>776</sup> As an aspect of continuing creation, however, Pannenberg understands it to refer 'to the continuous creation of new forms of being.' Contingency and newness hold priority over what appear to be static forms. In reality, the appearance of 'enduring forms and even of patterns of events now appears itself as a contingent fact in the course of that history.'<sup>777</sup> Preservation, therefore, means the continuation of the identity of creaturely beings as well as the reliability of the laws of nature, which together reflect God's faithfulness to bring the creation process to completion.<sup>778</sup> This maintains an emphasis on God as an active presence in history,<sup>779</sup> while also keeping history (and creation) open to the future. This is an especially important point, since one of the critiques raised against traditional forms of providence focused on the way it was limited to either a hidden and 'self-sustaining internal development,'<sup>780</sup> or it required thinking of God intervening in disruptive ways from outside the system of intra-mundane causal structures. In Pannenberg's model the whole of creation itself, in each of its elements, is an ongoing 'miraculous' act in which the truly new is possible, not in spite of present forms of life, but precisely because present (contingent) forms of life are still in process of becoming what God intended for them.<sup>781</sup>

As a trinitarian act, creation (and therefore preservation) is 'a free act of God as an expression of the freedom of the fatherly goodness that in the Son accepts the possibility and the existence of a creation distinct from himself, and of the freedom

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<sup>776</sup>Pannenberg, *Introduction*, 40.

<sup>777</sup>Pannenberg, *Introduction*, 41; cf. idem, *Systematic* 2: 42.

<sup>778</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 2: 43.

<sup>779</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 357.

<sup>780</sup>Colin Gunton, *Triune Creator*, 184.

<sup>781</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 2: 46. Gunton makes a similar point regarding miracles (*Triune Creator*, 176, 177).

of the Spirit who links the two in free agreement.’<sup>782</sup> Preservation of the creature depends upon the work of the triune persons.

Only God has duration, and thus ‘all limited duration derives from him.’ Creatures therefore, have not only their independence, but their preservation-in-distinction through ‘the work of the Son’ and through the Spirit, for only in this way can they participate in God.<sup>783</sup> This participation of the creatures in the ‘divine Spirit of life,’ which makes possible higher levels of complexity in the forms of life, and therefore higher degrees of self-transcendence, does not entail the loss of distinction,<sup>784</sup> but precisely the opposite:

they participate in the divine life only to the extent that self-distinction from God (and therefore the Son) takes shape in them. The work of the Spirit in creation thus converges on the incarnation of the Son, in which creation finds fulfillment by the full manifestation of the divine likeness in humanity.<sup>785</sup>

In traditional models of providence, ontology and meaning were funded by protology--creation and eternal decrees, carried out in providence and predestination, according to an eschatological goal, all of which was determined by God’s ‘antecedent Plan.’<sup>786</sup> The affirmation that God was active in history, and that God alone was the guarantor of any meaning it possessed, assured individuals of hope for the future. In Pannenberg’s model however, the perichoresis of time and eternity, and of past, present and future, entails that the end (God’s future) has ontological priority<sup>787</sup> in the shaping of our present (and what is now *our* past). This creative love manifests itself in the ‘release of new reality,’ a reality that is truly contingent,

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<sup>782</sup>Pannenberg, Systematic 2: 30.

<sup>783</sup>Pannenberg, Systematic 2: 33, 32, 34; cf. *ibid.*, 30.

<sup>784</sup>Pannenberg stresses repeatedly that the maintenance of creaturely distinctions is God’s goal in creation, and creatures will retain their identities in eternity (cf. Systematic 1: 166-67, 422, 446; *idem*, Systematic 2: 20, 95; 173-74, 272; *idem*, Systematic 3: 554, 555, 580).

<sup>785</sup>Pannenberg, Systematic 2: 34.

<sup>786</sup>Henri Blocher, ‘Yesterday, Today, Forever: Time, Times, Eternity in Biblical Perspective,’ Tyndale Bulletin 52, no. 2 (2001): 201.

<sup>787</sup>Pannenberg, Kingdom of God, 63; cf. *ibid.*, 65; *idem*, Systematic 1: 405; and *idem*, Systematic 2: 97, 98, 100, 101-102, 108.

independent, and yet maintained in existence by God's sustaining power.<sup>788</sup>

Something like this appears to be what Pannenberg has in mind when he says that, 'because he is the power of the ultimate future, God has released to each single event its *actual* historical future. In relation to [our] past and present, God is constantly bringing himself back into his own eschatological futurity.'<sup>789</sup> Pannenberg seems to mean that *what* is 'released' is the future as it *embodies* the contingent choices of our past and present. Since the final future of each entity embodies all that went before of God's provision of life and of what the creature made of that provision, and since God sees the *whole* from his perspective in eternity, this creative-providence from the future need not be any more deterministic than creation from the past. The fact that God "stands" at the end or ahead of our present place in the story is as much an accommodation to a human time-bound perspective as saying God "stands" at the beginning. Thus, *what* God releases to each moment and each entity is not a future pre-determined by God alone, but rather a conferring of *being* and *shape* as these are contingently co-created by the entity and God, and as they constitute and receive shape and meaning from the end of its story. In this way Pannenberg can speak of the retroactive influence of Jesus' resurrection on the identity and being of his earlier life and ministry.<sup>790</sup>

Nevertheless, although Pannenberg insists that the human experience of life includes real freedom and contingency, it is difficult to see how his model avoids a determinism of the whole, as it is defined in terms of the future of God.<sup>791</sup> Fear of determinism exerted a strong shaping influence on Wiles', Sanders' and Gilkey's doctrines of providence. Pannenberg is well aware of the tyranny of God's providence when explicated in terms of a single subject over against the world. He

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<sup>788</sup>Pannenberg, *Kingdom of God*, 66; cf. 70.

<sup>789</sup>Pannenberg, *Kingdom of God*, 62 (italics mine); cf. idem, *Systematic 2*: 33-34.

<sup>790</sup>Cf. his letter to Timothy Bradshaw on this point ('Appendix: Letter to the Author from Professor Pannenberg,' in *Trinity and Ontology: A Comparative Study of the Theologies of Karl Barth and Wolfhart Pannenberg*, by T. Bradshaw (Edinburgh, UK: Rutherford House, 1988), 402.

<sup>791</sup>Cf. Paul Sponheim's critique on this issue ('To Expand and Deepen the Provisional: An Inquiry into Pannenberg's *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, in *Beginning With the End: God, Science, and Wolfhart Pannenberg*, eds. Carol R. Albright, and Joel Haugen [Chicago and La Salle, IL: Open Court Publishing Company, 1997], 390-394). Cf. also Colin Gunton's critique of Pannenberg on this point (*Triune Creator*, 218).

suggests instead that theological determinism can be avoided if one begins, not with the idea of ‘God as an acting subject,’ but with God’s position in eternity. This means that God, bracketing the whole, allows the theologian to begin ‘with experience of the connections in the course of world history.’<sup>792</sup> He seems to be assuming here his relational metaphysics of the part-whole.

As Pannenberg explains it, the parts only have their meaning and identity in reference to the whole, even though the contingent actions and experiences of the parts on the way to the whole (which is the future of God), help to constitute that whole.<sup>793</sup> He suggests that the concept of spirit as field helps to account for the way the as-yet-unavailable whole can in turn retroactively constitute the parts *in via*, in a way which enables them to correspond to what they will be in the end: ‘the dynamic field can be conceived as creative of its “parts” and therefore as constitutive of them as well as of the whole that is dependent on them as elements.’<sup>794</sup> With this concept of spirit as dynamic field, Pannenberg has introduced a third element into his relational metaphysics. Formally at least, this three dimensioned metaphysics explains both the constitution of the Trinity and of the world in terms of a part-whole structure as these two “elements” are enabled to act reciprocally on each other.<sup>795</sup> Pannenberg states further that ‘it is this kind of principle [that is, the field concept] that is referred to in theological language about the dynamics of God’s spirit as creator of life.’ And ‘spirit’ as used in Christian scriptures is defined by Pannenberg as ‘a kind of force, comparable to the wind but prior to bodily phenomena.’<sup>796</sup> As the dynamic mechanism through which part and whole relate, the spirit’s universal

<sup>792</sup>Pannenberg, Systematic 1: 388.

<sup>793</sup>Pannenberg, Systematic 3: 209-210.

<sup>794</sup>Pannenberg, ‘Theological Appropriation of Scientific Understandings: Response to Hefner, Wicken, Eaves, and Tipler,’ in Beginning With the End: God, Science, and Wolfhart Pannenberg, eds. Carol R. Albright, and Joel Haugen (Chicago and La Salle, IL: Open Court Publishing Company, 1997), 433.

<sup>795</sup>Pannenberg, Anthropology in Theological Perspective, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1985), 511; cf. idem ‘Theological Appropriation,’ 432-433.

<sup>796</sup>Pannenberg, ‘Theological Appropriation,’ 433, 429.



presence as field becomes the source of the eternal meaning of each constituent in creation.<sup>797</sup> It seems that with this “tri-partite” relational metaphysics, Pannenberg wants to be able to think of the contingent present and the completed future as having some degree of mutual influence on each other. At the very least, this is a counter-intuitive proposal.

The second element in Pannenberg’s doctrine of providence is that of divine *co-operation (concursum)*. With this term he is able to give more precise conceptual clarity to the way in which God’s faithfulness underwrites preservation. It allows him to articulate the dynamic creative aspect of God’s action in all moments by using traditional terminology, since what God conserves is not simply the ‘original constitution’ of entities, but also ‘their changes and activities.’<sup>798</sup> It also allows him to maintain both the ongoing dependence of creatures upon the Creator, and also their true ‘independence.’ On the way to ‘the future of consummation’--when ‘eternity [will] have come fully and totally into time and taken up time into itself’--‘the path to this point is by no means determined in every detail. Openness to the future relative to each finite present is real, not illusory. Hence believers are summoned to cooperate with God on his way to the future of his kingdom by their actions and their prayers.’<sup>799</sup> Thus, God’s ‘influence on the creature’s freedom [takes] the form of persuasion and accommodation.’<sup>800</sup>

The third element of Pannenberg’s doctrine of providence, the divine *government*,<sup>801</sup> plays an important role in God’s creative plan. This element of providence is crucial for ensuring that the creative process and the guidance of individuals and world history results in their arrival at God’s eschatological goal of

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<sup>797</sup>Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, 520, 528.

<sup>798</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 2: 46-47.

<sup>799</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 3: 209-210.

<sup>800</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 2: 48, 48, n. 117, 52.

<sup>801</sup>Pannenberg often uses the terms ‘divine government’ and ‘providence’ interchangeably (cf. *Systematic* 2: 57, 58).

the 'completion and glorification of all creation.'<sup>802</sup> Pannenberg sees a close relation between God's attributes of patience and wisdom and his world government.<sup>803</sup>

One of the strengths of Pannenberg's (as with Barth's) doctrine of divine governance lies in its stress on the providential care 'that sees to the well-being of individuals in isolation,' therefore implying the intrinsic worth of every creature, and not seeing them 'as just a means to the higher levels of his [God's] world government.' Each creature is 'an end in God's work of creation and therefore an end for his world government as well'.<sup>804</sup> This view of the significance conferred on each created entity by its relationship to the Creator is reflected in Herbert Butterfield's view of history in which each moment of history has its own importance, a significance and meaning that exceeds its link to the *end* of history. He uses the analogy of 'a Beethoven symphony' in which there is beauty not only in the whole, but also in 'each note in its particular context.' Similarly, each individual person 'exists for the glory of God.'<sup>805</sup> It is especially important for the credibility of a doctrine of providence to be able to integrate God's universal care with his individual care, thus ensuring each entity receives the benefit of the Father's full attention. This emphasis finds biblical precedent in Jesus' assertion that the Father's care reaches from the birds of the air to one's clothing.<sup>806</sup>

Pannenberg also rejects 'the structuring of the older doctrine of providence in terms of end' in which the good of the individual is subservient to the good of the universal. Even when the end good is God himself, Pannenberg still thinks this gives God's 'world government . . . a harsh sound and leaves the impression that his rule is

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<sup>802</sup>Pannenberg, 'Doctrine of Creation,' 159. It should be noted, however, that contrary to Gilkey and Moltmann, Pannenberg does not foresee a 'universal reconciliation of all things,' since this would leave 'too little place for human independence' (Systematic 3: 453; cf. idem, Systematic 2: 48).

<sup>803</sup>Pannenberg, Systematic 1: 440.

<sup>804</sup>Pannenberg, Systematic 2: 53.

<sup>805</sup>Herbert Butterfield, Christianity and History (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), 67; quoted in James Montgomery Boice, God and History, vol. 4, Foundations of the Christian Faith (Downer Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 42-43.

<sup>806</sup>Matt. 6:25-33 RSV.

one of oppression.<sup>807</sup> Nevertheless, while Pannenberg resists any notion of a government by coercion--God governs by persuasion<sup>808</sup>--at the same time,

[I]t is the supreme art of God's world government to cause good to come from evil (Gen. 50:20) and in this way to overcome evil with good . . . . Hence there grow from historical disasters opportunities for new beginnings. This is true in the church's history as well. God's judgements on his church force renewal on it or bring it by a detour to the state it was resisting.<sup>809</sup>

By his government God is thus able to integrate into his 'purposes for the world the failures and evil that these failures cause.'<sup>810</sup> It is for this reason that Pannenberg often uses the terms 'government' and 'overruling' interchangeably. It is not always clear how God achieves these ends without sometimes limiting the creature's freedom to resist his guidance. It might be helpful for Pannenberg to use an analogy such as the that of the grand chess master, or the idea of 'rough theatre' in which it is the task of the 'divine director' to establish the general parameters of the play, and then to work to 'evoke talents, skills and capabilities the creature (who remains the "actor") did not know it had. It gives God a supremely active and creative role, leading and being alongside . . . , but does not destroy the autonomy of the creature.'<sup>811</sup>

Although many have abandoned belief in providence, Pannenberg responds to those who feel theology should exercise reservation with regard to claims of God's providence by arguing that 'without preservation and world government we cannot think of God as Creator.'<sup>812</sup> For Pannenberg, therefore, belief in the trinitarian God as revealed through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ entails a belief in both a triune Creator and a triune Provider. Through the Son and Spirit, the Trinity

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<sup>807</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 2: 53, n. 135.

<sup>808</sup>Cf. Pannenberg, *Systematic* 2: 16.

<sup>809</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 3: 525.

<sup>810</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 2: 58; cf. idem, *Systematic* 2: 167.

<sup>811</sup>Timothy J. Gorringer, *God's Theatre: A Theology of Providence* (London, UK: SCM Press Ltd., 1991), 81, 82.

<sup>812</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 2: 54, n. 136.

is so intimately involved in the nature, existence and purpose of the world of creatures that to think of God as at a distance from the life of creatures is to posit that creature's non-existence.<sup>813</sup> This is his theological answer to the problem posed for belief in providence by a modern scientific world-view.

### Providence and the Eschatological Kingdom

Several features of Pannenberg's doctrine of creation lend emphasis to the notion of history as moving toward an ultimate goal: creation as an ongoing project in which the future has priority over the past and present, which in turn entails the irreversibility of time (and hence instantiates contingency and history)<sup>814</sup>; eternity (as God's ultimate future) embracing all of time and hence giving shape and meaning to each moment and event<sup>815</sup>; and the idea of 'the process of its [creation's] ongoing consummation.'<sup>816</sup> These characteristics of the creative act gives providence its forward-looking orientation, and the creative act has these features because it is oriented toward the eschatological goal of the coming Kingdom of God. As the 'loving and saving presence of God,'<sup>817</sup> providence accomplishes more than just the maintenance of the status quo, but serves instead the goal of effecting God's universal rule, and of establishing independent subjects of that rule--a rule which also constitutes salvation.<sup>818</sup>

The first implication for providence that derives from its service to the Kingdom derives from fact that only there will the goal of God's creative act be fully realised, that is, when God will establish *fellowship* or *community* with and among his creatures.<sup>819</sup> In light of that purpose, even now there is the idea of God's

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<sup>813</sup>Pannenberg, Systematic 1: 420.

<sup>814</sup>Cf. Pannenberg, 'Doctrine of Creation,' 167-171.

<sup>815</sup>Pannenberg, 'Theological Appropriation,' 432-433; cf. idem, Systematic 3: 209-210.

<sup>816</sup>Pannenberg, Systematic 1: 447.

<sup>817</sup>Pannenberg, Introduction, 59; cf. *ibid.*, 60.

<sup>818</sup>Pannenberg, Systematic 3: 525.

<sup>819</sup>Cf. Pannenberg, Systematic 1: 7; cf. also, Pannenberg, 'Eschatology and the Experience of Meaning, chap. in Basic Questions in Theology, vol. 3, trans. R. A. Wilson, The Library of

providential presence in and with his creation. As Pannenberg notes, 'Jesus called this God whose reign was near, and even dawning with his own coming, the (heavenly) Father.'<sup>820</sup> And while 'heaven' is the transcendent and inaccessible location of 'God's throne and lordship,' it also 'expresses the thought that all times are present for the eternity of God'--God is omnipresent in all dimensions of the universe.<sup>821</sup> As an eternal act, God's creative act embraces the whole of the creaturely existence, and therefore 'each individual creature--indeed, each event, each moment--has its beginning [and distinction] in God's creation.'<sup>822</sup>

James Loder and W. Jim Neidhardt criticise Pannenberg for being Hegelian, that is, for subsuming the created other in the One, and for emphasising universality over relationality.<sup>823</sup> But Loder and Neidhardt fail to recognise that precisely in emphasising God's ultimate future, and the whole, Pannenberg is able to maintain both the distinction and the significance or meaning of the particulars, not only in time, but also in eternity. Pannenberg instantiates this in the doctrine of God as Trinity, versus Hegel's doctrine of God as a single Subject related to himself. Pannenberg is tireless in emphasising both God's creative goal of the independence of creatures and their free participation (through the Son and the Spirit) in fellowship with the Trinity. He insists, for example, that 'the ultimate aim of God's election is thus the fellowship of a renewed humanity in his kingdom. In this fellowship God's purpose in creation will be fulfilled. For the aim of the Creator is that his creatures should live in his presence.'<sup>824</sup> This fellowship requires, or presupposes, an

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Philosophy and Theology, eds. John McIntyre, and Ian T. Ramsey (London, UK: SCM Press Ltd., 1973), 202.

<sup>820</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 259.

<sup>821</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 402, 410-412.

<sup>822</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 2: 42, 43; idem, *Systematic* 1: 410.

<sup>823</sup>Loder and Neidhardt, *The Knight's Move: The Relational Logic of the Spirit in Theology and Science* (Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers and Howard, Publishers, Inc., 1992), 53-54.

<sup>824</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 3: 523. Sponheim's concerns regarding the possible pantheism and loss of human freedom in Pannenberg's theology ('Inquiry into Pannenberg') can also be answered in a similar manner.

otherness-in-relation structure, which is Pannenberg's way of ensuring that this structure is not reduced to a monism.

God's creative and saving presence manifests several characteristics. Beyond the most basic sense of God simply *being there*, sustaining every dimension of the universe, God also preserves, co-operates with, and governs his creatures. In addition to these functional distinctions, however, the *quality* of that presence derives from God's character as Father and his essence as love, and is revealed in his universal care for creation as paradigmatically revealed through Jesus.<sup>825</sup> This 'fatherly love of God' is intrinsically linked to his coming reign.<sup>826</sup>

A second implication of the Kingdom for providence resides in the idea of God's *ultimate* rule over all creation. Providence, in its aspect of divine governing or (over)ruling, is intrinsically linked to the certainty of God's coming eschatological Kingdom, and therefore also to the final 'consummation of the creation of the world.'<sup>827</sup> Since Pannenberg understands the event of the cross and resurrection to be the paradigmatic example of God's providential care of the world,<sup>828</sup> that means that as a trinitarian event<sup>829</sup> it is the defining revelation of trinitarian providence. This is so precisely because the cross and resurrection reveal the Father's *deity*, *lordship* and *rule* over history, as mediated through the work of the Son and Spirit.<sup>830</sup> In this crucial and unique event lie the advance revelation of the goal of creation, and for this reason its eschatological promise and hope.<sup>831</sup> The meaning of this event includes the promise of final redemption and consummation, which consists of

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<sup>825</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 259, 262.

<sup>826</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 260, 263.

<sup>827</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 3: 540.

<sup>828</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 2: 438. Colin Gunton holds a similar view (*The Triune Creator*, 174).

<sup>829</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 314; cf. Moltmann for a similar view (*The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* [London, UK: SCM Press Ltd., 1974], 240-241).

<sup>830</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 315; cf. *ibid.*, 322; and *idem*, *Systematic* 2: 439, n. 119.

<sup>831</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 3: 538; Pannenberg notes that Moltmann and others are correct to ground 'eschatology in the concept of promise . . . inasmuch as eschatological hope can rest only on God himself' (*Systematic* 3: 539).



unhindered fellowship with the Father through the Son and Spirit in the eternal Kingdom.

A third important implication of the connection between providence and the Kingdom consists of the role providence plays in theodicy. The fact that providence must be understood as intimately linked to creation, soteriology, Christology, pneumatology and eschatology enables Pannenberg to stress the *unity* of the divine works in the economy. God's goal in creating a world of finite creatures cannot be achieved without his providential oversight of the whole, and yet providence in turn is not a work in isolation from his saving and consummating work. It is on the basis of this overall schema of the unity of the divine works *ad extra* that Pannenberg is able to deal with theodicy.

His approach to theodicy requires a providential, soteriological and eschatological emphasis because he argues that one of the chief defects in traditional theodicies is to seek to absolve the Creator from responsibility for sin and evil by linking sin to the creature, and also by arguing that the present world is, in itself, as originally created, good--that the original state was perfect, or, with Leibniz, it is the best of all possible worlds.

Pannenberg, therefore, rejects the traditional view. First, the idea of an originally complete and perfect creation is not an adequate doctrine of creation since the Bible also emphasises God's continuing acts of creation and salvation.<sup>832</sup> This means that although creation appears to us as oriented to the past, it is in fact oriented to the future, and therefore encompasses the whole of the space-time continuum. A second and related issue is the idea that only by risking abuse of creaturely freedom could God create independent creatures. Third, this means that creation is as yet incomplete, and therefore the present state of the world and its orders at any given time are on their way, still under construction, and therefore require the final and future redemption and consummation of the eschaton.<sup>833</sup>

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<sup>832</sup>Cf. Pannenberg, 'Human Life: Creation Versus Evolution?', in *Science and Theology: The New Consonance*, ed. Ted Peters (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, A Member of the Perseus Books Group, 1998).

<sup>833</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 2: 161-174. Richard Swinburne has also come to the conclusion that theodicy cannot be treated apart from its connection to particular Christian doctrines, such as that

Finally, in Pannenberg's doctrine of providentially guided creation with its goal in the future Kingdom, he is able to account for the necessary hiddenness of God's presence in history. In order for each human to have the space and time to develop a distinct identity and self-transcendence, God must grant to them the option to freely choose, or reject, their own true destiny of participating in the Son's filial relation to the Father. This fact of anthropology, taken along with the openness and contingency of the developing act of creation, goes some way toward allaying Wiles' fear of divine determinism and arbitrariness. Nevertheless, the remaining question about the coherence of Pannenberg's part-whole metaphysics ultimately leaves Wiles' concern unresolved.

### ***INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF PANNENBERG'S MODEL***

Whether or not Pannenberg's metaphysical system of a tri-partite relationality is judged to be successful, his attempt to integrate the insights of philosophy, sciences and culture under the theological claim of God as the all-determining power moves in the right direction, for it is an attempt to develop a plausible worldview in which a trinitarian doctrine of providence plays the key hermeneutical function of helping its adherents to make meaning out of the ambiguities of life.

For Pannenberg, providence is an aspect of continuing creation and is not limited to the maintenance of a static system. It effects instead the establishing of independent creatures and sets up the Father's saving rule over those creatures. Thus, providence has an eschatological goal and purpose and power, and as such underwrites and encourages faith and hope, releasing humans to trust in the triune God and to act in history. Free human activity (history) is made possible by the Trinity's freedom in creating. The divine freedom is reflected in the contingency of the universe (in its openness to the future), and both freedom and contingency are essential in order for humans to become truly other than God, to have the time and space in which to develop a self-conscious independence in and through which they can then freely relate, as finite others, to God. The goal of creation, providence, redemption and consummation is the development of such creatures who, after the

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of 'life after death in a new world' (*Providence and the Problem of Evil* [Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1998], xi).

pattern of Jesus' relation to the Father and in the power of the Holy Spirit, enter freely into fellowship with God.

The central role that Pannenberg gives to God's eternal act of continuing creation defines God's relation to the ongoing events and history of the world in strongly transcendent and immanent modes. There are moments in his development of this model in which God seems very directive and one wonders if there is not a hint of occasionalism in the notion of each moment being a new creation, and in even the laws of nature being contingent. This picture is spared the problem of arbitrariness and coercion, however, by the character of the relation that obtains within the inner-trinitarian life. The relation of Father, Son, and Spirit, through the medium of the divine essence ('the Spirit of love'), guarantees that all of God's actions are guided by a love that makes room for, and sets free, the other. In the case of creaturely others, they are only truly an 'other' when they become aware of their independence and then freely accept their finite otherness as gift from God. In that moment they participate in the freedom of true personhood and in the filial relationship of the Son to the Father.

Another important emphasis of Pannenberg's is that even though God does have a goal in mind for creation, his care extends to ensuring that *every* individual entity find fulfilment in that overall goal. This focus on the individual counters Wiles' focus on the whole and the tendency to lose the individual--in spite of Wiles' concern for the freedom of the individual. Such radical freedom as Wiles proposes necessitates a loss of particular divine care for the individual. Thus, a relational metaphysics of the triune God does a better job of preserving *both* human freedom, creativity and identity *and* the sense of God's personal availability to, and involvement with, each creature.

The ability of God to act freely (in the form of promise and in the form of creating the new), and to overrule creaturely intents, is the basis for meaning in history. But just here Pannenberg's system is also threatened by determinism, not from a *past* decree but from the all-determining future, which is God. Pannenberg only avoids such determinism by insisting that the whole incorporates the truly contingent, that the independence granted to the creature will not be overridden in order to spare them the eternal consequences of sin. In other words, Pannenberg

takes more seriously the logical consequences of libertarian freedom than does Moltmann.

### MOLTMANN: ESCHATOLOGICAL, TRINITARIAN PANENTHEISM

Some reviewers classify Moltmann as Reformed, while others take him to be Lutheran in his theological sympathies. Although his theology reflects strong elements of both traditions, his pursuit of a 'dialogical theology' leads him to resist confinement to any particular "school" of theology.<sup>834</sup> This fact, combined with the diversity of influences upon his theology, seems to indicate the prudence of accepting Moltmann's own classification of his theology as ecumenical.<sup>835</sup>

One might expect, from the *magnum opus* of a systematic theologian, a comprehensive system of theology which forms a 'harmonious' and 'integrated whole.'<sup>836</sup> While Moltmann is certainly systematic,<sup>837</sup> he refuses to attempt a unified theological system which is complete in itself,<sup>838</sup> or to detach theological reflection from 'existential experience.'<sup>839</sup> He defines his approach as a '*dialogical*' enterprise open to other points of view.<sup>840</sup>

While his method of painting with broad strokes<sup>841</sup> can leave some important aspects of doctrines underdeveloped or ambiguous,<sup>842</sup> there are two assets to this

<sup>834</sup>Moltmann, forward to Moltmann: Messianic Theology in the Making, by Richard J. Bauckham (Hants, U.K.: Marshall Morgan and Scott Publications Ltd., 1987), viii, ix.

<sup>835</sup>Moltmann, God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation, trans. Margaret Kohl, The Gifford Lectures, 1984-1985 (SCM Press Ltd., 1985), xiii; cf. Richard J. Bauckham, The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann (Edinburgh, U.K.: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1995), 1-3.

<sup>836</sup>Moltmann, The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God, trans. Margaret Kohl (origin. pub. in Britain as The Trinity and the Kingdom of God by SCM Press Ltd., London, UK; New York, NY: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1981), xi.

<sup>837</sup>Richard J. Bauckham, Theology of Moltmann, 4.

<sup>838</sup>Moltmann, The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology, trans. Margaret Kohl (SCM Press Ltd., 1996), xiv.

<sup>839</sup>Moltmann, forward to Moltmann: Messianic Theology, vii.

<sup>840</sup>Moltmann, forward to Moltmann: Messianic Theology, viii.

<sup>841</sup>Cf. Moltmann, forward to Moltmann: Messianic Theology, ix-x.

<sup>842</sup>Three recent surveys of Moltmann's theology include a treatment of some of the more important problems and unanswered questions in Moltmann's work: Douglas Farrow, 'Review Essay:

method. On the one hand, a negatively stated benefit arises from the recognition that such doctrines as the Trinity, for example, exhaust one's conceptual and logical categories. For this reason an overly rationalistic delineation of the doctrine can result in reducing it to absurdities. On the other hand, stated positively, this approach reflects the metaphorical nature of theological concepts, theories and models, thus allowing some latitude for imprecision. It also accords well with Moltmann's own stated desire to 'forego correctness in order to be concrete,' to 'take sides and speak onesidedly.'<sup>843</sup>

The survey of Wiles' understanding of the God-world relation led to the question as to whether Wiles ever developed a doctrine of providence at all. A similar question arises from an overview of Moltmann's theology. Don Schweitzer complains that Moltmann 'has never directly discussed in depth' the concept of providence.<sup>844</sup> This is a particularly problematic criticism in view of the purpose of this project--if Moltmann does not deal 'in depth' with providence, upon what basis can he represent a trinitarian treatment of providence? The answer I propose to that question suggests that Moltmann's theology does in fact deal with the *concerns* of providence, although his approach to doing theology is not compatible with a more traditional treatment of the topic. In the process of working out an eschatological and trinitarian doctrine of creation he does in fact grant a significant role to providence, but he makes it an aspect of his doctrine of creation, framing the doctrine in such a way as to avoid the overtones of God's predetermination of history. Since he does maintain a doctrine of providence (even if underdeveloped), the focus here will include bringing to the fore some of the implications of Moltmann's doctrines of the Trinity, creation and eschatology for his view of providence.

It should be noted that Moltmann's theology embodies a complex and interconnected range of ideas spread throughout his works. It is impossible,

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In the End is the Beginning: A Review of Jürgen Moltmann's Systematic Contributions,' Modern Theology 14, no. 3 (July 1998): 425-447; Richard Bauckham, Theology of Jürgen Moltmann; and Richard J. Bauckham, ed., God Will be All in All: The Eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann (Edinburgh, U.K.: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1999).

<sup>843</sup>Moltmann, forward to Moltmann: Messianic Theology, viii.

<sup>844</sup>Don Schweitzer, review of The Coming of God, by Jürgen Moltmann, in Journal of the American Academy of Religion, 66, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 452.

therefore, to do justice to the complexity, subtlety and scope of his thought here, or to the intrinsic connections between major doctrines. These connections, for the most part, will have to be assumed and only noted as far as is necessary in order to bring into focus his treatment of providence.

### ***THE GOD-WORLD RELATION: TRINITY, CREATION AND HISTORY***

The doctrine of the Trinity is central to Moltmann's whole theological enterprise, and not surprisingly it embodies several problematic tensions. Some of these affect his understanding of providence, and will be noted in that connection.

#### **God as Trinity**

Pivotal to Moltmann's theological project is his intent to reclaim a central role for the Christian doctrine of God as Trinity. He contends, first, that the doctrine of the Trinity, rooted in the historical and dynamic 'relationship between the Father, the Son and the Spirit' is *the* Christian doctrine of God.<sup>845</sup> He maintains, secondly, that the Trinity itself can serve as 'the matrix for a new kind of thinking about God, the world and man,' by establishing the basis for thinking 'in terms of relationships and communities.'<sup>846</sup> This amounts to a metaphysics of relationality.

Moltmann adopts the Orthodox monarchical view of the inner-trinitarian constitution in which the Father is understood as being "the origin of the Godhead."<sup>847</sup> He modifies, however, what he sees as two corresponding weaknesses in the Orthodox view. First, he qualifies the use of the word 'origin' as uniquely applicable only to the constitution of the Trinity from the Father. When the term is ascribed to the Father to ensure the unity of 'both the Godhead *and* the ["subsequent"] relationships' of the trinitarian persons, it blurs the important distinction 'between the constitution of the Trinity and the Trinity's inner life.'<sup>848</sup> It

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<sup>845</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 64; cf. *ibid.*, 65, 149; cf. also Moltmann, *Crucified God*, 207, 239, 240, 241; Moltmann, 'The "Crucified God": A Trinitarian Theology of the Cross,' *Interpretation*, 26, no. 3 (July 1972): 295.

<sup>846</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 16, 19.

<sup>847</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 165.

<sup>848</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 189, 183 (*italics mine*); cf. *ibid.*, 173, 188.



tends to reduce what ought to be thought of as ‘the equally primordial character of the trinitarian Persons’ to a modalism of the Father.<sup>849</sup> Second, Moltmann’s way of avoiding the danger of tri-theism is to insist that ‘personality and relationships [of the divine persons] are *genetically connected*,’ and as such ‘the two arise simultaneously and together.’<sup>850</sup>

An important third emphasis in Moltmann’s doctrine of the Trinity is an identification of the immanent and economic trinities. This move raises problems for a doctrine of providence understood in a theistic context. John Zizioulas, for example, thinks this type of move threatens an important distinction between God and the world. He argues that while it is appropriate to assert that ‘the Economic Trinity is the Immanent Trinity,’ this must be qualified by saying ‘the Immanent Trinity is not exhausted in the Economic Trinity. Otherwise the Incarnation is projected into God’s eternal being’ with the result that ‘this kind of God offers no real hope for Man.’ Moreover, it entails that God ‘transcends suffering, . . . not by virtue of his being, but by some kind of becoming, which means that he is in constant need of historical reality (involving suffering) in order to be what he *will* be, true God.’<sup>851</sup>

Randall Otto raises a stronger criticism, noting that ‘Moltmann’s doctrine [of God] is based on Bloch’s Ontology of the Not-Yet, so that there can be no God until the end, which there can never finally be, lest God lose the transcendence of the future as his condition of being . . . . God is instead a “possible God” (*Gott-möglich*), coming from the future, from the non-Being of potentiality which, for Moltmann, “must be higher ontologically than reality.”’<sup>852</sup> Even though this

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<sup>849</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 166.

<sup>850</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 173.

<sup>851</sup>John Zizioulas, ‘The Doctrine of God the Trinity Today: Suggestions for an Ecumenical Study,’ in *The Forgotten Trinity 3 A Selection of Papers presented to the BCC Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine Today*, ed. Alasdair I. C. Heron (London, U.K.: BCC/CCBI Inter-Church House, 1991), 24.

<sup>852</sup>Randall Otto, ‘The Use and Abuse of Perichoresis in Recent Theology,’ *Scottish Journal of Theology* 54, no. 3 (2001): 375.

criticism overstates what Moltmann intends,<sup>853</sup> and perhaps misunderstands his theological concepts of time, eternity and the Sabbath,<sup>854</sup> it does emphasise two implicit dangers in his theological metaphysics: the loss of the self-sufficient Creator God and, therefore, the permanent absence of this God,<sup>855</sup> at least in the *creatio continua*.

Moltmann actually insists, for example, that what occurs on the cross not only *reflects* the trinitarian relations, but retroactively *is* part of the trinitarian history of God.<sup>856</sup> By making the immanent Trinity dependent on the experiences of the economic Trinity, and then identifying the two, Moltmann has radicalised Rahner's formula.<sup>857</sup> Yet, he also insists that although the Trinity is open to the world, the ontological structure of the nature of the Trinity remains the same from all eternity, otherwise 'God's truth' could not be his 'faithfulness.'<sup>858</sup> In fact, he sees the doctrine of the Trinity as the safeguard against an identification of divine and created ontologies.<sup>859</sup> Bauckham suggests, however, that if one wishes to maintain both sides of this ambiguity, then one needs to retain a more cautious doctrine of the

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<sup>853</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 166; cf. *ibid.*, 23-24, 107, 138, 164; cf. also *idem*, *The Coming of God*, 294, 298; and *idem*, *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London, UK: SCM Press Ltd., 1990), 302; and *idem*, *Crucified God*, 229-230.

<sup>854</sup>Cf. Bauckham, 'Time and Eternity,' in *God Will Be All In All: The Eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Edinburgh, UK: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1999), 167-170.

<sup>855</sup>Cf. Gilkey's critique of Moltmann's model for seeming to remove God from involvement in current history 'into the relative chill of abstract, because future, possibility' ('The Universal and Immediate Presence of God,' in *The Future of Hope: Theology as Eschatology*, ed. Frederick Herzog [New York, NY: Herder and Herder Inc., 1970], 97). Cf. also, Stanley Grenz, and Roger Olsen, *Twentieth-Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Carlisle, UK: The Paternoster Press; Downer Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 185.

<sup>856</sup>Moltmann, *Crucified God*, 240-241; cf. *idem*, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 32-33, 160-161. In his earlier work, Moltmann could even say the Spirit '*emerges*' from the event of the cross (*Crucified God*, 247, 252 [italics mine]).

<sup>857</sup>Cf. Bauckham for a similar analysis of this difficulty (*Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, 154-157).

<sup>858</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 154; cf. *ibid.*, 153-154; and *idem*, *God in Creation*, 133.

<sup>859</sup>Cf. Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 111-114; *idem*, *God in Creation*, 98; *idem*, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London, UK: SCM Press Ltd., 1992), 219-220.

immanent Trinity in which 'it could be conceived as what remains unchanging in the changing trinitarian relationships of God's history.'<sup>860</sup> If the God behind providential creation is the God who overcomes the transience of the history which calls into question his ability to care for his creation, then one has to guard against reifying the limited and temporally qualified information about God available in the economy into the absolute categories of the immanent Trinity.

### **The Trinity and Creation: 'Eschatological, Trinitarian "Panentheism"'**

In light of his concern to maintain God's active presence in creation, Moltmann has developed an ecological doctrine of creation by which he intends to move beyond the classical and dualistic concept of God as divine Subject over against the world, opting instead for an 'eschatological, trinitarian "panentheistic"'<sup>861</sup> model of God's presence in the world through the Son and Spirit.<sup>862</sup> Relating this concept to providence, therefore, one can say God preserves space within himself for creation by actively holding back his presence and continually reiterating 'his primal "yes" to his creation.'<sup>863</sup> In this way, God protects creation from the threat of the primordial 'annihilating Nothingness.'<sup>864</sup> Hence, there is a necessary kenosis and hiddenness of God in creation.

In his account of the creative process, however, Moltmann comes very close to an *emanationist* doctrine of creation. He does, in fact, make use of emanationist language and imagery.<sup>865</sup> For example, his reference to the Spirit as the space and energy of creation, even to the point of saying there is no clear distinction between

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<sup>860</sup>Bauckham, *Theology of Moltmann*, 156; cf. *ibid.*, 154-157. Cf. Grenz and Olson, *Twentieth Century Theology*, 182-183.

<sup>861</sup>This label is Bauckham's (*Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, 158).

<sup>862</sup>Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 13-14, 98-103, 94-98.

<sup>863</sup>Moltmann, *Way of Jesus Christ*, 290.

<sup>864</sup>Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 96.

<sup>865</sup>Cf., for example, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 107; *idem*, *God in Creation*, 75-76, 83-85; and *idem*, *Spirit of Life*, 195.

the divine energy which the Spirit is, and created energies,<sup>866</sup> suggests emanationism. Moreover, as noted above, talk of the reciprocal relation between the Trinity and creation, as manifested in the retroactive effect of the cross on the eternal inner-trinitarian relations,<sup>867</sup> predisposes Moltmann's model of the God-world relation to emanationism.<sup>868</sup> Again, Moltmann's sometimes ambiguous definition of the primordial 'space' established for creation can lead to the idea that it is a physical 'space' *within* God's own being.<sup>869</sup>

Moltmann responds to 'misunderstandings' about 'the ecological concept of space' by noting that the perichoretic nature of all relations (divine and human) creates their own space.<sup>870</sup> Here, at least, Moltmann defines space as a relational quality among existing things. This same metaphysics would also apply to the character of time. On this view, time is internal to relations; aeonic time is the character of time defined as the relations among completed creatures in the eschaton, and hence equates to a "'fullness of the times'": 'In that new aeon a mutual perichoresis between eternity and time comes into existence, so that on the one hand we can talk about "eternal time" and on the other about "eternity filled with time."'<sup>871</sup>

Moltmann wishes to maintain a strong metaphysics of perichoresis which enables not only the trinitarian Persons to exist in and out of each other (constituting

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<sup>866</sup>Moltmann, *Spirit of Life*, 195. On the role of the Spirit as the means of the Father's presence and the energy of the Father's creation through the Son, cf. Moltmann, *Spirit of Life*, 178-179, 196; idem, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 104, 111-114, 125, 122-128; idem, *God in Creation*, xii, 9, 10, 12, 67, 212, 262.

<sup>867</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 110; idem, *Crucified God*, 255.

<sup>868</sup>Cf. Grenz' and Olson's critique of Moltmann on this point (*Twentieth Century Theology*, 185-186). Pannenberg also notes the danger of emanationism in Moltmann (*Systematic 2*: 20-21).

<sup>869</sup>Pannenberg raises a similar criticism against Moltmann at this point. He notes that while Moltmann is correct to distinguish between 'the space of God . . . [and] that of the created world,' he 'cannot follow Moltmann's thesis that the space of creation precedes creation, and the spaces created in it, as a third thing between the divine omnipotence and the world of creatures . . . . Opposed to this thesis is the truth that God is omnipresent in the space of creatures' (*Systematic 2*: 89, n. 229).

<sup>870</sup>Cf. Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 299-300, 301.

<sup>871</sup>Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 295. It remains an open question whether Moltmann has resolved the 'time-eternity' question. Cf. Richard Bauckham's analysis of this issue ('Time and Eternity,' 155-193; cf. esp. 179-180, 180-181, 184, n. 59, 185, n. 62, 185-186).

both their unity and individuality), but also allows creation and the Trinity to constitute each other to some degree.<sup>872</sup> The concept of the perichoresis of the times of creation (past, present, future), of eternity and time, of divine and created attributes, and of God's absolute eternity and aeonic time,<sup>873</sup> amounts to a kind of pan-perichoretic relational metaphysics which embraces not only the constitution of the Trinity apart from creation, but also includes creation within the inner-trinitarian history.

When defining the perichoretic basis of the constitution of persons, however, Pannenberg is more careful than Moltmann in distinguishing the concept as it applies, on the one hand, to the constitution of trinitarian persons, and on the other hand, to the constitution of human persons.<sup>874</sup> In the sense that both divine persons and human persons 'achieve their selfhood ec-statically outside themselves,' 'human personality is similar to the trinitarian persons.'<sup>875</sup> But there are two important differences: first, 'being a human person is not so exclusively constituted by the relation to one or two other persons as it is in the trinitarian life of God'; second, 'because in the case of human personality the identity of the person is never fully or exclusively defined by the relation to the other, in human self-awareness the human I and the human self are different.'<sup>876</sup> This insight into the qualitative difference between perichoretic relations within the Trinity and those on the human level helps to draw the line of demarcation between God and the creature a little more definitively.

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<sup>872</sup>Cf. Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 167-168, 98-99. Moltmann argues against using the category of 'causality' when speaking of the creative work of God, opting instead for the language of 'an intricate web of unilateral, reciprocal and many-sided relationships' (*God in Creation*, 14).

<sup>873</sup>Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 295.

<sup>874</sup>Randall Otto thinks Moltmann's God is threatened with the non-being of always becoming ('Abuse of Perichoresis,' 366-384). Moltmann is aware of the qualitative difference between divine and human personhood (*Trinity and the Kingdom*, 189-190), but tends to minimise the uniqueness of each of the trinitarian persons as well as the distinction between divine personhood and human personhood (cf. Bauckham's critique [*Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, 173-179]).

<sup>875</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 430.

<sup>876</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 431.

In spite of the foregoing problems, Moltmann clearly wants to avoid an emanationist doctrine of creation.<sup>877</sup> He seems to have three interconnected strategies for achieving this goal: first, making *space and time* within the intra-trinitarian history for creation; second, positing creation through the Son/Logos and Spirit, thereby maintaining the *transcendence of the Father*; and third, appropriating distinct roles to each divine person in their establishing of the kingdom.

Moltmann thinks of the initial creative act as the making of space and time for creation within the inner-trinitarian fellowship or history. The Father, as Creator, breathes out into the *nihil* the forms and energies of creation made possible by the Logos and Spirit.<sup>878</sup> It is in the Trinity's character as a differentiated, social unity that Moltmann finds the means of maintaining creation's distinction over against the Trinity. Since these created forms correspond to the Father's love for the Son, are given their continuing form and identity through the Son, and since they continue to exist only through the energy of the Spirit, their status as *created* entities (and not divine emanations) is maintained through the forms given them through the Word, that is, through the Son as Logos.<sup>879</sup>

This breathing out of the Word and Spirit in the *creatio originalis* is the first movement or phase of the creative process. The next phase is that of *creatio continua*, the sphere of God's ongoing creative work as it finds expression in the Son's and Spirit's hidden influence in evolution,<sup>880</sup> and in the ongoing work of the Spirit as the energy of life and source of potentialities and transformation.<sup>881</sup> The

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<sup>877</sup>Moltmann explicitly rejects the reduction of creation to a modalistic self-realisation of God on a Hegelian model (*Coming of God*, 335-336). He also rejects the idea of God as the eternally creative substance (*God in Creation*, 83-84). It is not clear, however, whether he has succeeded in avoiding the concept of the Father as *subject* being eternally creative, since his love not only *necessarily* generates the Son and breathes the Spirit, but also creates an Other (cf. Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 157).

<sup>878</sup>Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 206. This intimate link between the Father and the world, made possible by the Son and the Spirit, accounts for the correspondences between the Trinity and the world (cf. *ibid.*, 212).

<sup>879</sup>Cf. Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 108; *idem*, *Way of Jesus Christ*, 289, 290; and *idem*, *God in Creation*, 9, 97-98.

<sup>880</sup>Cf. *God in Creation*, 208-212; *idem*, *Way of Jesus Christ*, 287-305.

<sup>881</sup>Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 210-212.



Father's role as Creator, at this stage, seems to consist of his 'longsuffering love' ('patience') allowing creation time and space to develop its own free response to his love.<sup>882</sup> This creative process comes to completion in a third and final step, *creatio nova*. This objective has been made possible by God taking into his own inner-trinitarian life all the history of the world, and the very 'nothingness' and sin which threatens his whole creation.<sup>883</sup> This was the meaning of the trinitarian event of the cross and resurrection. Because every disintegrating possibility and actuality was taken up into the trinitarian life in the cross, the Son becomes the bearer and perfecter of the humanity created to be the image of God, the created 'Other' for God's love.<sup>884</sup> His resurrection perfects and guarantees the final restoration of all things.<sup>885</sup> Therefore, the key word of the new creation is 'completion.' Thus, if the original creative moment required a prior self-limitation (kenosis) of God's omnipresence in order to make room for the non-divine, then that 'primordial moment' of *creatio originalis* finds its completion in the 'eschatological moment' of *creatio nova* in which 'heaven and earth find their final, transfigured form in God's unrestricted omnipresence itself.'<sup>886</sup>

The picture here is one of divine withdrawal, creation and return. What saves this model from emanationism (in Moltmann's view) is that something truly new, the non-divine, is brought into being with creation. Although the concept of God's<sup>887</sup> omnipresence *once again* pervading all "spaces" sounds at least ambiguous, in that return the non-divine becomes flooded with the glory of God's immediate presence,

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<sup>882</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 30; cf. *ibid.*, 98.

<sup>883</sup>Moltmann, *Crucified God*, 246, 218, 277.

<sup>884</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 168.

<sup>885</sup>Through the openness of the trinitarian history to that of the world, and by the former taking up and transforming the latter, the trinitarian history is intrinsically linked to soteriology (cf. Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 96, 178).

<sup>886</sup>Moltmann, *Way of Jesus Christ*, 329; cf. *idem*, *Coming of God*, 295.

<sup>887</sup>Moltmann often uses the term 'God' when he really means 'Father.' At other times he seems to use the term to refer to the Godhead. This ambiguity hinders the construction of a consistently worked out Trinity-world relation.

but not absorbed into it in such a way as to lose its identity.<sup>888</sup> Moltmann's perichoretic, relational metaphysics is meant to ensure creation is not simply subsumed into God. This eternal distinction between Creator and creation is reflected in the distinction Moltmann makes between the 'aeonic' time of the new creation and God's 'absolute eternity.'<sup>889</sup> The completed creation will participate in God's 'essential eternity,' but will not share that eternity in the same way as do the trinitarian Persons--an implicit reference, perhaps, to the absolute difference between trinitarian and human ontologies.<sup>890</sup> Nevertheless, concepts such as the 'mutual' perichoresis between divine and created attributes, and language which refers to 'the Creator no longer remain[ing] over against his creation,' but dwelling in it,<sup>891</sup> seems to stretch the ability of the concept of perichoresis to retain *difference-in-relation*. This problem raises a question about the distinction of the world's being and history from the Trinity's being and history, and therefore a question about the relevance of continuing to insist upon God's *providential* care of that which is, in fact, an expression of God's own intra-trinitarian love.

Moltmann further pictures this trinitarian creation as three distinct aspects of the kingdom of God. Each aspect features the specific contribution of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, respectively: 'creation, liberation, glorification.'<sup>892</sup> In appropriating the creative impetus to the Father,<sup>893</sup> Moltmann differs from the traditional use of the doctrine of appropriations, because his doctrine of creation specifies *distinct roles* for the trinitarian Persons, and not merely appropriations. These roles actually reflect the unique relations, identities and roles of the trinitarian Persons in the primordial Trinity. In keeping with the fact of the *trinitarian decision* to create the world<sup>894</sup> is

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<sup>888</sup>Cf. Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 107, 138; idem, *Way of Jesus Christ*, 302; idem, *Coming of God*, 294; and idem, *God in Creation*, 258.

<sup>889</sup>Moltmann, *Way of Jesus Christ*, 330-331.

<sup>890</sup>Cf. Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 307.

<sup>891</sup>Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 295.

<sup>892</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 212.

<sup>893</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 112, 113, 113-114; cf. *ibid.*, 164, 165-66, and esp. 167-168.

<sup>894</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 111.

the work of the *Trinity* in carrying out the whole project. Not only does the *initial* creation proceed ‘from the Father,’ it is also to ‘be ascribed to the unity of the triune God’ because ‘the Son, as Logos, and the Spirit, as energy, are both involved.’<sup>895</sup> For example, the Father’s generative love constitutes him as ‘Creator,’ but only as mediated through the Son and Spirit. In this way ‘God communicates himself’<sup>896</sup> to creation.

Moltmann remains ambiguous as to whether the phrase, ‘God communicates himself,’ refers only to the Father as Creator, or to the whole Trinity. If the latter, then he might have specified that due to the equality of their perichoretic *relations* (not constitution), when one Person of the Trinity is present in creation, all are present, and yet each in his own distinct way. This was Pannenberg’s important insight,<sup>897</sup> and it would appear to reflect Moltmann’s intention as well.<sup>898</sup>

Because Moltmann places such an emphasis on the multiple roles of Spirit in the economy, he tends to appropriate both God’s presence and transcendence to the Spirit.<sup>899</sup> While one could not push the model too far, it would be truer to the intent of his trinitarian model if he consistently associated transcendence with the Father, immanence with the Spirit, and otherness with the Son/Logos.<sup>900</sup> In this way his doctrine of the Trinity would more effectively ensure both distinction and relation.

Moltmann’s trinitarian, panentheistic model of creation, with its special focus on the role of the Spirit, the open nature of the inner-trinitarian history toward the world, and the reciprocal nature of the relation between the divine and human histories,<sup>901</sup> provides the context for his treatment of creation and providence.

<sup>895</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 114; cf. idem, *God in Creation*, 94-98.

<sup>896</sup>Moltmann, *Way of Jesus Christ*, 289.

<sup>897</sup>Pannenberg can speak of the ‘co-operation’ of the trinitarian Persons in their works *ad extra* (*Systematic* 1: 388).

<sup>898</sup>Cf. Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 9; idem, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 122, 98, 212; and idem, *Spirit of Life*, 295, 297.

<sup>899</sup>Cf. Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 10, 262, 9; and idem, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 125.

<sup>900</sup>Cf. Ted Peters for a somewhat similar appropriation (*God the World’s Future: Systematic Theology for a New Era*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000], 86).

<sup>901</sup>Cf. Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 64, 160-161.

## **THE GOD-WORLD RELATION: PROVIDENTIAL CREATION**

Although Moltmann clearly wishes to maintain some form of the doctrine of providence, his treatment of the doctrine amounts to an emphasis within his trinitarian doctrine of creation. Several reasons can be deduced for his non-traditional coverage.

### **A Non-Traditional Coverage**

First, there is a methodological reason: his primary concern is not to defend ‘ancient doctrines or ecclesiastical dogmas,’ but to stimulate new ideas.<sup>902</sup>

Second, there is Moltmann’s stress on the unity of all God’s works *ad extra*. Contrary to initial appearances, therefore, Moltmann’s lack of explicit treatment of the topic of providence does not mean he ignores its essential concerns. Key foci in Moltmann’s theology include the kingdom of God (God’s rule), divine solidarity with creation, promise and hope, eschatology and new creation, and the Trinity. These themes demonstrate that he is, in fact, very much concerned with how God *provides* for his creation. The future arrival of God’s kingdom as the new heaven and earth *requires* (or presupposes) God’s present provision for its future realisation. Moltmann’s creation-affirming doctrine of the God-world relation is reflected in its *grounding* in the unifying of the divine acts of creation, redemption, and consummation<sup>903</sup>; in the *confirmation* and *completion* provided by the incarnation of the Son (which affirms equally: the *goodness* of creation; *protest* against the evil and suffering experienced by creation; the *promise* of God’s redemption of all of creation); and in the *anticipation* of the eschatological transformation of creation by the Spirit when God will be “‘all in all.’”<sup>904</sup> Moltmann’s doctrine of creation includes the work of the Son in redemption, since the Son’s self-emptying is only an extension of the pre-mundane, self-emptying of God in order to make ‘room’ for creation. The work of the cross and resurrection is the *creative* work of the Father,

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<sup>902</sup>Moltmann, *Coming of God*, xiv.

<sup>903</sup>Cf. Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 259.

<sup>904</sup>Moltmann, *Way of Jesus Christ*, 237-238.

Son and Spirit in carrying forward the project of creation. Thus, Moltmann speaks of salvation as a work of *creatio ex nihilo*, as a completion of the creative work of annihilating the ‘annihilating Nothingness.’<sup>905</sup>

Moltmann’s concern for relevance,<sup>906</sup> therefore, has led him to posit that God’s creative and redemptive activity are not two distinct enterprises, but rather reflect God’s single goal of the eventual consummation of all of creation (including every entity that has ever existed) in the new creation<sup>907</sup>--the divine-human community in the Kingdom of Glory. Bishop Graham Leonard has suggested that in theology,

the most important issue of the moment is the relationship between our doctrine of creation and our doctrine of redemption. As the prologue to Saint John’s Gospel indicates, the same God who made the world is also the Savior who redeemed it. But we have yet to draw out the implications of such ideas as perhaps we ought.<sup>908</sup>

It is in the context of this type of dual concern that Moltmann has developed his doctrine of a three-phase creation sequence, and this combined concern remains a theme throughout his work in systematic theology. This is evident in the way he sees the future of the kingdom providing the model and the impetus for praxis in the present, and hence for his ecological concerns and liberation sympathies. The concept of providence as a distinct work tends to be eclipsed, therefore, by a focus on the role of all God’s works as they facilitate the accomplishment of the goal of creation. The ongoing, three-phase act of creation, rooted in the Trinity’s suffering and passionate love,<sup>909</sup> already entails God’s caring presence at every moment of its existence: ‘In the preservation of the world, nature and grace are so closely interwoven that it is impossible to talk about the one without the other.’<sup>910</sup>

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<sup>905</sup>Cf. God in Creation, 89-91, 93; cf. *ibid.*, 208-209, 210.

<sup>906</sup>Cf. Moltmann, Crucified God, 83-4, 239.

<sup>907</sup>Moltmann, Coming of God, 259.

<sup>908</sup>Graham Leonard, ‘Bishop Graham Leonard,’ in Roundtable: Conversations with European Theologians, interview by Michael Bauman (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1990), 61.

<sup>909</sup>Moltmann, Trinity and the Kingdom, 209, 98.

<sup>910</sup>Moltmann, Way of Jesus Christ, 291.

Third, a panentheistic model of the God-world relation presents special challenges to the older concept of providence which included a notion of God as all-powerful Subject over against the world, governing the universe according to an inflexible, overarching masterplan. Providence in this model often took the form of God's unilateral, eternal decrees, which were the expression of the divine will. This God was impassible, and was able to predict the future precisely because he had foreordained and predestined it. Providence therefore had no room for human innovation, but was entirely prescriptive. Creation was "outside" of God; it was his work *ad extra*. Providence traditionally focused on sustaining, preserving, and governing what was *already established*. Only in this way was providence linked to historical time. Even when God was defined as Trinity, in the Trinity's works *ad extra* there was no distinction between the Persons--they exercised a single lordship and unity of activity toward creation. In Moltmann's view, this picture fostered the metaphor of intervention, hierarchical relationships, structures of domination in social and political relationships, and the exploitation of the earth.

In contrast to this, in Moltmann's model God maintains a much more interactive relation to the created order. In a very real sense the exact nature of the immanent trinitarian relations with creation will only be decided as the result of the nature of the responses of the creation to the creative, redemptive and consummating work of Father, Son and Spirit--the "masterplan" is still taking shape.

Fourth, as continuous creation, all of life has a processive, and therefore historical character,<sup>911</sup> rooted as it is in the provision by the Spirit of dynamic possibilities and potentialities. Remembrance, promise and hope constitute the conditions for the experience of life as history.<sup>912</sup> Individual life and ontology, the life of societies (human and non-human), and even the life of the Trinity itself has a history, is going somewhere. In this picture of the dynamic fluidity of forms and developing complexities lies perhaps the clue as to why providence, in the sense of

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<sup>911</sup>Cf. Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 265.

<sup>912</sup>Moltmann, *Way of Jesus Christ*, 236-237; cf. idem, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. James W. Leitch. Preface to the new paperback ed. trans. Margaret Kohl (London, UK: SCM Press Ltd., 1967; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 102-112, 259-261.



preservation of initially given forms, tends to be overshadowed by the concepts of innovation ('*novum*--the new thing'<sup>913</sup>) and promise in Moltmann's theology.

Implicit in all of these observations is the fact that the overarching scheme in Moltmann's theology is not that of a pre-creation masterplan of providence, embodied in a set of fixed divine decrees, but rather that of the future kingdom of God which entails a final joining of the inner-trinitarian history<sup>914</sup> with the history of the world and with the history of the Trinity's developing relation with the world's history.<sup>915</sup> Richard Bauckham points out that 'history' is a modern concept, often associated with the ideas of change and progress.<sup>916</sup> History as a conceptual category, as a way of viewing the human experience of life as open process, depends upon 'remembrance and hope,' the difference between the world as experienced in the present and remembered from the past, and the expectations (in the present) for the future.<sup>917</sup>

Moltmann, like Gilkey,<sup>918</sup> attempts to re-Christianise history so that humans have a present share in God's rule,<sup>919</sup> and a role in shaping creation.<sup>920</sup> For that reason, '*Christian* eschatology has nothing to do with apocalyptic "final solutions"' where God unfolds his 'last act,' and where 'God has the final word.'<sup>921</sup> In addition

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<sup>913</sup>Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 27; cf. *ibid.*, 27-29.

<sup>914</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 174-175.

<sup>915</sup>Moltmann, *Way of Jesus Christ*, 238; Cf. *idem*, *Crucified God*, 255-256; and *idem*, *Spirit of Life*, 289-301. This reciprocal relationship allows all of creation to participate in God's own glory, thereby glorifying God (Cf. Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 96, 90, 209; cf. also *idem*, *God in Creation*, 5).

<sup>916</sup>Bauckham, *Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, 8-9; cf. *ibid.*, 210-211.

<sup>917</sup>Moltmann, *Way of Jesus Christ*, 236; cf. *ibid.*, 245.

<sup>918</sup>Cf. Gilkey, *Reaping the Whirlwind: A Christian Interpretation of History* (New York, NY: Seabury Press, 1981), 159-160.

<sup>919</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 221.

<sup>920</sup>Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 224-225.

<sup>921</sup>Moltmann, *Coming of God*, xi, x. As already noted, in light of Moltmann's universalism, it is hard to see how his model avoids giving God the 'final word.'

to his emphasis on God's continuous 'sustenance, providence, [and] guidance,'<sup>922</sup> therefore, Moltmann places special emphasis on the potentiality inherent in creation toward the genuinely new, since this potentiality is rooted in God who must be thought of as 'the possibility and as the enabling of all potential realities: "All things are possible for God."' <sup>923</sup> What the kingdom will be in the end both incorporates the free actions of humans in the present and yet exerts influence on the present, thereby enabling work toward it now to have maximum meaning for the future.

The metaphysics of *becoming* holds not only for present reality, but also for the eternal creation,<sup>924</sup> since it too, is characterised by "'eternal time,'" openness, 'history, future and possibility.' There will not be a final, disruptive ending, so much as 'the end of pre-history and the beginning of the "eternal history" of God, human beings and nature.'<sup>925</sup> In this way Moltmann is able to retain the category of history both for our present experience of God and for the eternal creation in which 'God will be all in all.'

The new creation is not merely the replacement or restoration of the old (or original) creation, but the *fulfilment* of the old in the kingdom of God.<sup>926</sup> Thus, concern about God's presence and present activity in the world must take as their organising centre, not the fate of the individual soul, nor of the world, but rather, 'the centre of both personal and cosmic hope has to be *God*, God's kingdom and God's

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<sup>922</sup>Moltmann, 'Reflections on Chaos and God's Interaction with the World From a Trinitarian Perspective,' in Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., eds. Russell, Robert John, Nancy Murphy, and Arthur Peacocke, A Series on 'Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action,' ed. Robert John Russell (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications; Berkeley, CA: The Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 1997), 208.

<sup>923</sup>Moltmann, 'Reflections on Chaos,' 209-210 (first italics mine); cf. idem, God in Creation, 214.

<sup>924</sup>Moltmann, 'Reflections on Chaos,' 209. Cf. idem, God in Creation, 213-214.

<sup>925</sup>Moltmann, God in Creation, 213; cf. idem, Coming of God, xi. Moltmann notes that to use the category "'eternal history"' of God, human beings and nature. . . . means thinking of change without transience, time without the past, and life without death. But this is difficult in the history of life and death, becoming and passing away, because all our concepts are moulded by these experiences or transitoriness. Yet finitude is not necessarily bound up with mortality' (God in creation, 213).

<sup>926</sup>Moltmann, Way of Jesus Christ, 239-240; cf. idem, Trinity and the Kingdom, 90, 95; and idem, God in Creation, 229, 242-243.

glory.<sup>927</sup> And since God is triune, God's presence and provision in the economy have a trinitarian framework.

### Providential Creation Versus a Separate Work of Providence

As noted above, for Moltmann the whole project of creation (*creatio originalis*, *creatio continua*, and *creatio nova*) participates in the Trinity's suffering, passionate love, and therefore already entails God's caring presence at every moment of its existence--all the works of God are already providential.

Talk of divine providence is, therefore, reinterpreted and given a larger context of meaning, that is, one formed by hope for the future kingdom of glory, in addition to creation in the past. The future kingdom of glory is 'the inner ground'<sup>928</sup> of creation in the past. Moltmann's ecological doctrine of creation by the Trinity seeks to emphasise the Trinity's intimate involvement and immanent presence in creation, even to the point of speaking of the inclusion of created history within God's history. This image need not be interpreted as a type of Hegelian pantheism since the Trinity has its own distinct priority of being, even though creation, because it is intended to reflect the kind of perichoretic love relations that exist among the persons of the Trinity, can be said to *correspond* to its Creator.<sup>929</sup>

God, therefore, unobtrusively 'accompanies' creation in all of its movements.<sup>930</sup> The theological idea of the world as 'in the process of "becoming"'<sup>931</sup> does not override the laws of nature, but actually works through them. The laws of nature themselves reflect God's faithfulness, or better, reflect the

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<sup>927</sup>Moltmann, *Coming of God*, xv.

<sup>928</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 209.

<sup>929</sup>Cf. Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 212, 220-221, 223, 228-229; and idem, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 202. There are passages where Moltmann can sound Hegelian, such as when explaining that it is the *character* of the Father's 'engendering, fatherly love' 'which begets and brings forth the Son,' which accounts for it being 'open for further response through creations which correspond to the Son. . . . Hence the love of the Father which brings forth the Son in eternity becomes creative love. . . . Creation proceeds from the Father's love for the eternal Son. It is destined to join in the Son's obedience and in his responsive love to the Father, and so to give God delight and bliss' (Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 168). Cf. also, idem, *Way of Jesus Christ*, 238.

<sup>930</sup>Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 207; cf. *ibid.*, 211-212.

<sup>931</sup>Moltmann, 'Reflections on Chaos,' 209; cf. idem, *Crucified God*, 338; idem, *God in Creation*, 212-213, 94-95.

order and wisdom which grounds creation in and through the Son. In their role as co-creators,<sup>932</sup> God not only accompanies humans by sustaining them in being, but also in their creative contribution to the creative process (concursus).<sup>933</sup> God's continuing action receives its character from its orientation toward God's eschatological goal 'of the new creation of all things, the divinization of the cosmos and of the eternal creation' where God will indwell creation.<sup>934</sup> And since 'continuous creation,' which 'is creation's ongoing history,' points to God's new creation of all things, it reflects not only God's preserving activity, but also his innovating activity.<sup>935</sup> For this reason the unity of creation as original ('determined'), continuing ('undetermined' or open) and new (consummated) 'has its foundation, not in itself, but outside itself' in the Trinity.<sup>936</sup> This opening of the inner-trinitarian history to include the history of creation within itself makes the life of the triune God itself the context of meaning of creation's history<sup>937</sup> and of the providence which guides its direction.<sup>938</sup> Thus, the world (in all phases of creation) exists in God, and God, through the Son and Spirit, dwells within creation.

The trinitarian framework of providence can be summarised as follows: the Father's patience (born of his passionate, suffering love) preserves the world in existence in order to give it space and time in which to respond to the offer of

<sup>932</sup>Moltmann, God in Creation, 224; cf. idem, Trinity and the Kingdom, 221.

<sup>933</sup>Moltmann, God in Creation, 211.

<sup>934</sup>Moltmann, 'Reflections on Chaos,' 209. Use here of the concept of the 'divinization' of creation may reflect an imprecision in language, since in his earlier work Moltmann stopped short of advocating the divinization of creation. He writes: "Creation in the Spirit of God" is an understanding which does not merely set creation over against God. It also simultaneously takes creation into God, though *without divinizing it* [italics mine]. In the creative and life-giving powers of the Spirit, God *pervades* his creation' (Moltmann, God in Creation, 258).

<sup>935</sup>Moltmann, Way of Jesus Christ, 291. Thus, Moltmann can say that continuous creation is innovative providence, and vice versa (God in Creation, 209-10). Cf. Moltmann, Trinity and the Kingdom, 209.

<sup>936</sup>Moltmann, God in Creation, 163; cf. idem, Way of Jesus Christ, 240, 253-254.

<sup>937</sup>Moltmann, Trinity and the Kingdom, 5; idem, God in Creation, 162-163; idem, Way of Jesus Christ, 291.

<sup>938</sup>Cf. Moltmann, God in Creation, 204, 205, 206, 207, 211; idem, Way of Jesus Christ, 103; idem, Crucified God, 338.

liberation (through the Son) from ‘closed-in-ness,’ a response enabled by the energies of the Spirit.<sup>939</sup> Seen in this trinitarian framework, *all of God’s works are providential*. These works are accomplished through a sequence of re-orderings within the ‘open Trinity’ in which different persons of the Trinity appear more “prominent” at different moments in the history of God with the world.<sup>940</sup>

Within this general preserving, concurring, guiding and innovating relation, the Father, Son and Spirit each play an essential role in the sustenance and forward motion of creation.

### The Father’s role

As noted above, providence must be seen against the overarching conceptuality of the kingdom, for it is as part of that kingdom that the concerns of the doctrines of creation and of providence come into play. Because the Father is the Creator, providence comes under the domain of the kingdom of the Father.<sup>941</sup> Moreover, because the realisation of this kingdom is effected by a continuous creation sequence which receives its shape from the future,

the interpretation of providence must be expanded correspondingly: providence and the general universal government of God does not merely mean the continuing preservation of creation from destruction. It also means that God keeps the world’s future open for it through the gift of time, which works against all the world’s tendencies to close in on itself, to shut itself off. . . . It is wrong simply to see the kingdom of the Father as a ‘kingdom of power’. Self-limitation, self-emptying and the patience of love already begin with the creation of the world, and it is these things that mark out God’s whole government of the world, and his providence, as being the kingdom of the Father.<sup>942</sup>

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<sup>939</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 210-211; cf. *ibid.*, 212-213.

<sup>940</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 93, 94.

<sup>941</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 210, 207, 205.

<sup>942</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 209-210.

### The Son's role

In the creative sequence, Christ is the mediator of the creation.<sup>943</sup> For this reason the creation is sustained through the Son and is enabled to participate in the 'trinitarian relations of the Son, the Father and the Spirit.'<sup>944</sup>

The cross event, with its retroactive influence on the immanent Trinity, is really only a concrete instance of that 'eternal obedience which he [the Son] renders to the Father in his whole being through the Spirit, whom he receives from the Father. Creation is saved and justified in eternity in the sacrifice of the Son, which is her sustaining foundation.' In a way which can seem to make the Trinity dependent for its being on creation, Moltmann says 'the Son's sacrifice of boundless love on Golgotha is from eternity already included in the exchange of the essential, the consubstantial love which constitutes the divine life of the Trinity.'<sup>945</sup>

The incarnation of the Son was not simply a contingency rescue plan necessitated by human sin, but rather 'creation represents the external framework and preparation for the Son's incarnation' planned from all eternity.<sup>946</sup> The incarnation, and the salvation from death achieved by it, is all part of God's original provision for the steps necessary in creating and establishing an 'Other.'<sup>947</sup> On this view, 'what is at stake is the fulfilment of the promise given with creation.'<sup>948</sup>

The Son, or Logos, is the continually spoken creative Word, the continually reiterated 'primal Yes' which gives created entities their distinct forms and identities.<sup>949</sup> 'All created things'<sup>950</sup> receive their preservation through the Word from

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<sup>943</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 104, 108, 168; cf. idem, *Way of Jesus Christ*, 287-289.

<sup>944</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 122; cf. *ibid.*, 121, 117, 168; idem, *Way of Jesus Christ*, 287; and idem, *God in Creation*, 95.

<sup>945</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 168.

<sup>946</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 115, 114; cf. *ibid.*, 50, 107, 114-118, 168; cf. also idem, *God in Creation*, 242-243.

<sup>947</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 117, 108, 114.

<sup>948</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 118.

<sup>949</sup>Moltmann, *The Source of Life: The Holy Spirit and the Theology of Life*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London, UK: SCM Press Ltd., 1997), 118, 115-116; cf. Moltmann, *Way of Jesus Christ*, 290.



the threat of disintegration back into the ‘nothingness,’ in the face of which, they were created.<sup>951</sup> While ‘the Word specifies and differentiates through its efficacy,’<sup>952</sup> the very fact that all forms come from, and correspond to, this one Word ensures that they receive their unity and fellowship (‘community’) in the one creation of the one God through him.<sup>953</sup>

Moltmann’s understanding of the world’s relation to Christ as both its structure, redemption and completion highlights the importance of Christ’s role in understanding providence. If Christ’s role relates only to the *redemption* of the world, then it holds little insight as a paradigm for human free relation to God. If, however, Christ also has *creative* significance, then God must intend humanity’s free response to the Trinity, since this is modelled in Christ’s relation to the Father. Whether or not this also requires a fully mutual, reciprocal syncretism between human and divine action, it can at least point to a qualified reciprocity between God and humans in interpersonal relationship. The goal of such a model of asymmetrical,<sup>954</sup> but truly reciprocal personal relations, gives the incarnation of the Son a dual purpose: redemption *and* completion of the creation of a divine-human community.

### The Spirit’s role

With his trinitarian, panentheistic model of creation, Moltmann intends to supplement Barth’s christocentric model of trinitarian presence by including a stronger emphasis on the *Spirit’s* role in creating, sustaining, redeeming and

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<sup>950</sup>Moltmann, Way of Jesus Christ, 290.

<sup>951</sup>Moltmann, Way of Jesus Christ, 288; cf. *ibid.*, 282, 287; cf. also *idem*, God in Creation, 95.

<sup>952</sup>Moltmann, Way of Jesus Christ, 289.

<sup>953</sup>Moltmann, Way of Jesus Christ, 287; cf. *idem*, God in Creation, 116; and *idem*, Source of Life, 118-120.

<sup>954</sup>Cf. Kevin Vanhoozer’s critique of Brümmer on this point, that is, it is difficult to conceive of the creator-creature relationship as *fully* mutual and reciprocal, even if one allows for certain dimensions of the relationship to have the quality of reciprocity--limited of course, by the finite capacities of the creature (‘Introduction: The Love of God,’ in Nothing Greater, Nothing Better: Theological Essays on the Love of God, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer [Cambridge, UK; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001], 18-19).

renewing the world.<sup>955</sup> Moltmann understands evolution to be evidence of ‘the self-movement of the divine Spirit of creation,’<sup>956</sup> since ‘the Spirit is the principle of creativity on all levels of matter and life,’ and as such ‘creates new possibilities.’<sup>957</sup> Thus, ‘the whole creation is fabric woven by the Spirit, and is therefore a reality to which the Spirit gives form.’ But this ‘form’ is not a predetermined blueprint so much as a ‘harmony’ of relationships, ‘a dynamic web of interconnected processes.’<sup>958</sup> Because God creates through his life-giving and life-sustaining Spirit, and since this world is not presently ‘in accordance with God,’ then God the Spirit endures a kenosis just as does God the Son.<sup>959</sup> This suffering immanence of God becomes the promise of new creation and therefore of hope because the very fact that the world continues in being, sustained by the energies of the Spirit, is evidence of God’s intention to bring it to consummation.<sup>960</sup> In this regard, one might say that Moltmann’s understanding of providential creation in the Spirit involves a dynamic openness of the world ‘for God and for his future.’<sup>961</sup> The world *as* history has this character because history is intimately and fundamentally grounded in the history of the Spirit’s sustaining, quickening, and renewing work in creation, on all levels.<sup>962</sup>

Moltmann sees his doctrine of ‘creation in the Spirit’ as the solution to the weakness of ‘differentiated panentheism.’ The Spirit is able to both differentiate and bind together the ‘interconnected processes’ of creation.<sup>963</sup> The Spirit is the presence of God in creation, and yet just because he is God, he continually ‘preserves and

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<sup>955</sup>Moltmann, God in Creation, 10; cf. *ibid.*, xii, 96-97.

<sup>956</sup>Moltmann, God in Creation, 19.

<sup>957</sup>Moltmann, God in Creation, 100; cf. *ibid.*, 207, 214.

<sup>958</sup>Moltmann, God in Creation, 99, 100, 103.

<sup>959</sup>Moltmann, God in Creation, 102.

<sup>960</sup>Moltmann, God in Creation, 100, 102-103.

<sup>961</sup>Moltmann, God in Creation, 103.

<sup>962</sup>Moltmann, God in Creation, 102. This picture reflects the tension within God’s own being, and the ideas of the uniting and redemption of God (cf. *idem*, Coming of God, 305-306). These concepts reflect, in turn, the ‘event’ character of the Trinity (*idem*, Crucified God, 247).

<sup>963</sup>Moltmann, God in Creation, 103.

leads living things and their communities beyond themselves.<sup>964</sup> Through the creative, innovative and sanctifying Spirit, God's providential creation is given redemptive power and potential.

The Father's providential care of creation, therefore, is effected or mediated through the Son (or Word) and by the indwelling Spirit: 'The Word specifies and differentiates; the Spirit binds and forms the harmony.'<sup>965</sup> As stated here, the roles of Son and Spirit are very close to the way Pannenberg pictures them, although Moltmann does not always clearly maintain the distinction between their roles. Thus, the Son is the principle of distinction both within the Trinity and the economy, while the Spirit is the bond of unity. In this way creation participates in the character of the inner-trinitarian relations.

In summary, it is clear that for Moltmann the fact that God's history and human history are reciprocally related means God is presently acting in the affairs of this world--creation is continuous. What the Father provides in creation is not a super-imposed over-arching design, but the freedom of creative potential; not authoritarian rule, but an invitation to freely love,<sup>966</sup> an invitation to community.<sup>967</sup> The Son provides the restoration of a freedom for potential lost in the 'servitude to sin,' and the Spirit provides the resources to participate in 'the energies of the new creation.'<sup>968</sup> The freedom God provides and enables through the Son and Spirit is 'freedom as initiative, as creativity and as a passion for the future.'<sup>969</sup> It works not by imposition, but as a calling.<sup>970</sup>

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<sup>964</sup>Moltmann, God in Creation, 103; cf. *ibid.*, 101, 211-212; *idem*, Trinity and the Kingdom, 111, 113, 122, 209; *idem*, Source of Life, 120, 124; 123.

<sup>965</sup>Cf. Moltmann, Source of Life, 116; cf. also *idem*, Trinity and the Kingdom, 177-178.

<sup>966</sup>Moltmann, Trinity and the Kingdom, 209, 217, 163.

<sup>967</sup>Cf. Bauckham, Theology of Moltmann, 176-177.

<sup>968</sup>Moltmann, Trinity and the Kingdom, 210, 211. Moltmann notes that 'the freedom of the Christian faith' is a 'participation in the creative Spirit of God' (*ibid.*, 217).

<sup>969</sup>Moltmann, Trinity and the Kingdom, 218. This is a multifaceted freedom, defined as 'community,' 'fellowship,' or 'love and solidarity,' and freedom as oriented to a '*project*,' as 'a creative initiative,' as a 'creative passion for the possible,' and hence as oriented toward the pregnant future (*ibid.*, 216-217).

<sup>970</sup>Moltmann, Trinity and the Kingdom, 218.

Thus, in his reinterpretation of providence Moltmann does not reject or replace the doctrine, but rather gives it a future orientation through the idea of the openness of the original creation toward the new creation of the future. It is this future orientation which funds the ideas of promise, history and hope,<sup>971</sup> and for this reason, Moltmann's reinterpreted providence focuses more on promise than prescription, openness rather than fixed edicts, and on the Father's almighty power as understood in terms of 'self-limitation, self-emptying and the patience of love.'<sup>972</sup> His view here is similar to that of Timothy Gorringer, who suggests that 'what makes God God is not prediction but promise, God's *hesed* or covenant faithfulness.'<sup>973</sup> This fits well with Moltmann's concept of creation being open through the work of the Son in incarnation and of the Spirit in transformation and by these means also open to the participation of humans in the shaping of the future of creation. If the distinction can be maintained, one might say Moltmann understands God to have a general *goal* or *purpose* for creation (divine indwelling<sup>974</sup>) rather than a 'predetermined "divine plan for the Kingdom."<sup>975</sup> Admittedly this purpose or goal entails a plan, but the difference in emphasis is what is important.

The complex set of perichoretic relations which constitute not only the trinitarian being of God, but also of humans, society, and of God's relation to creation, applies equally to the relation of past, present and future. Thus Moltmann's pan-perichoretic, relational ontology of reality means that humans have their identity not in some particular feature of their being (such as reason), but in their ongoing, holistic and developing history of relations with God and each other.<sup>976</sup> Following

<sup>971</sup>Cf. Moltmann, Source of Life, 120, 122-124.

<sup>972</sup>Moltmann, Trinity and the Kingdom, 210; cf. idem, Coming of God, 145, 137.

<sup>973</sup>Gorringer, God's Theatre, 63. Moltmann, however, rejects the idea of linking providence to covenant if it refers to the past. Instead, he replaces the covenant established in the past with the glory of the future kingdom as the inner ground of creation and providence (Trinity and the Kingdom, 209).

<sup>974</sup>Moltmann, God in Creation, chap. 10; cf. idem, Coming of God, 307.

<sup>975</sup>Moltmann, Coming of God, 145.

<sup>976</sup>Moltmann, God in Creation, 257, 266, 229. Cf. Moltmann, 'Perichoresis: An Old Magic Word for a New Trinitarian Theology, in Trinity, Community and Power: Mapping Trajectories in Wesleyan Theology, ed. M. Douglas Meeks (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, An Imprint of

the Old Testament method of defining a person by his or her history, and therefore by 'the relationships in which he lives,' Moltmann notes that 'the human being has really no substance in himself; *he is a history*.'<sup>977</sup> Thus, the openness of creation which makes evolution possible is rooted in the openness of the trinitarian relation of love to make space and time for a created 'other,' and more specifically, rooted in the messianic nature of creation. The concept of the messianic nature of creation brings into focus again the *process* or *project* character of the world and history.<sup>978</sup> It stresses the fecundity of creation in its continuing development into ever more complex forms, and hence the creation of ever more possibilities. The messianic principle provides the promise and paradigm, the possibilities and character, of God's creating-redeeming-consummating work.<sup>979</sup> Messianic creation is new creation in the power of the Spirit (resurrection life), 'eschatological creation.'<sup>980</sup> Therefore, both creation itself, and the image of God in humans, find their paradigm in Christ.<sup>981</sup> As messianic creation, creation takes its character from the future, from resurrection,<sup>982</sup> and therein lies its hope.<sup>983</sup>

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Abingdon Press, 2000), 113. Cf. also John Polkinghorne's insistence that modern physics requires a holistic model of the universe in which, in all of its levels including its relation to God, 'there is an interconnectivity in things' (*Serious Talk: Science and Religion in Dialogue* [Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995], 88, 86); and also Polkinghorne's *One World: The Interaction of Science and Theology* (London, UK: SPCK, 1986; First Princeton Paperback printing, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987) 84-85, 89-92.

<sup>977</sup>Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 257 (italics mine); cf. *ibid.*, 261, 262, 265. This is the kind of language which invokes Randall Otto's critique of the lack of ontology in Moltmann's metaphysics of both the divine and the human. On the nature of human ontology as characterised by open historical process toward the new, cf. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 284-285; and *idem*, *God in Creation*, 229.

<sup>978</sup>Cf. Moltmann, *Way of Jesus Christ*, 301, 302.

<sup>979</sup>Cf. Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 225-229.

<sup>980</sup>Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 66.

<sup>981</sup>Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 225ff. As the Logos, Jesus Christ is the pattern of creation, as the risen Christ, Jesus is the possibility and model of all other human relations with God (*ibid.*, 242-3). Cf. Moltmann, *Spirit of Life*, 122; and *idem*, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 117.

<sup>982</sup>Cf. Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 196-7, 184.

<sup>983</sup>Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 66.

Beyond the explicit retention of such traditional (but reinterpreted) elements of providence as sustenance and concursus, Moltmann also deals with the providential question of divine rule.

### Divine Rule

Moltmann notes that ‘theology is never concerned with the actual *existence* of a God. It is interested solely in the *rule* of this God in heaven and on earth.’<sup>984</sup> The nature of this rule, however, is derived not from an understanding of God as sole sovereign or lord, but rather from the nature of the inner-trinitarian love. In this way the doctrine of the Trinity is seen, not as a problem, but as the solution to the divine sovereignty/human freedom issue.<sup>985</sup> As Bauckham summarises, ‘God is defined as love rather than as lordship’ and hence does not usurp human freedom, since this ‘love is compatible with freedom (or rather: constitutive of freedom).’<sup>986</sup> Moltmann’s concept of divine governance takes the form of a qualified use of the term ‘rule’:

Where it is the Father of Jesus Christ who *reigns*, . . . [and] who *preserves* the world through his patience, the liberty of created beings is given space and allowed time, . . . . The Father ‘rules’ through the creation of what exists and by opening up the eras of time.<sup>987</sup>

Two motives lie behind Moltmann’s stress on God’s “rule” as characterised by the Father’s ‘self-limitation, self-emptying and the patience of love.’<sup>988</sup> First, he rejects all forms of theological monotheism (by which he means unitarianism), monarchianism, hierarchical structures, and metaphors of power (with their political and ecclesiastical correlates).<sup>989</sup> Second, because of the requirements of his

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<sup>984</sup>Moltmann, Trinity and the Kingdom, 191.

<sup>985</sup>Richard Bauckham, Theology of Moltmann, 171. It was noted earlier, that in the relations and identities that define the life of Trinity, each divine person both gives and receives identity and love.

<sup>986</sup>Bauckham, Theology of Moltmann, 158.

<sup>987</sup>Moltmann, Trinity and the Kingdom, 210 (italics mine).

<sup>988</sup>Moltmann, Trinity and the Kingdom, 210.

<sup>989</sup>Moltmann, Trinity and the Kingdom, 192-202.



anthropology (and psychology), 'liberation from . . . ['this closed-in-ness']-- liberation for primal openness--cannot come about through superior strength or compulsion, but only through vicarious suffering and the call to that liberty which vicarious suffering alone throws open.'<sup>990</sup>

Moltmann claims that the rule of a unitarian God is inevitably coercive and limiting of human freedom 'because it points to complete dependency in all spheres of life.'<sup>991</sup> Such a charge, however, may be open to question. Moltmann himself stresses the total dependence of creation upon the creative, providential and salvific roles of the Father, Son and Spirit. This dependence results in the redemption and completion of all creation. Moltmann never seems to recognise or accept that this dependence has a coercive aspect, even when he claims that it is God alone who decides to save and therefore *will save all*.<sup>992</sup> Perhaps it would be more consistent for Moltmann to insist upon God's rule by 'attraction' as characteristic *only* of the new creation, since at some point on the way to that kingdom the Trinity will have to put a stop to both sin and sinfulness. Moltmann does picture this type of rule as characteristic of the 'heavenly city,' where 'God rules his world and his humanity, not through power but through the force of attraction,'<sup>993</sup> but he also wishes to avoid the concept of divine rule by domination in the *present* situation in history, and reinterprets God's rule as a perichoretic community of love. One wonders whether couching God's overcoming of sin in terms of 'help'<sup>994</sup> really mitigates the problem caused for human freedom by this universalism. This universalism does not explain how God overcomes the wilfully recalcitrant without forcing them to obey him by manipulating their desires. This seems to be very close to Helm's view, the only difference being that Helm speaks of God's ruling relation in terms of the single divine essence, while Moltmann speaks in terms of the Trinity. Moltmann, therefore,

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<sup>990</sup>Moltmann, Trinity and the Kingdom, 210.

<sup>991</sup>Moltmann, Trinity and the Kingdom, 191-192. Cf. Sallie McFague's similar criticism (Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age [Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987], 59-69).

<sup>992</sup>Cf. Moltmann, Coming of God, 245, 244, 132.

<sup>993</sup>Moltmann, Coming of God, 313.

<sup>994</sup>Moltmann, Coming of God, 244.

seems to remain ambiguous about his understanding of freedom. On the one hand, he speaks as if God grants humans libertarian freedom,<sup>995</sup> while on the other hand he defines the freedom of the kingdom of glory as the freedom to do God's will, 'of joy in the Good and in doing what is right simply as a matter of course.'<sup>996</sup>

It may be the case that the *logic* of Moltmann's *panentheistic* model actually *requires* the total inclusion of all creation in the Kingdom of glory, since nothing exists "outside" of God. This is worked out in terms of the merging of the trinitarian and human histories. Hence, an eternal state of disharmony at the creaturely level (for example, the traditional view of an eternal hell) would disrupt the harmony of the inner-trinitarian relations. Ultimately, therefore, Moltmann's universalism, and the tension it creates for the reality of human freedom, may be required more by his *panentheistic* trinitarian ontology than by the nature of trinitarian love. The concept of mutual love which Moltmann wishes to base upon the inner-trinitarian love is threatened by an implicit co-dependence between God and creation. This reflects the implicit emanationism and determinism in his model of providential creation and fails to recognise the true difference between divine and created ontologies. Gunton is correct, therefore, to insist that precisely because the intra-trinitarian love is 'self-sufficient' means that God is free to posit a creation upon which God does not become dependent.<sup>997</sup>

It is not as if Moltmann has no way out of this dilemma. He seems to think that if he allows the true otherness afforded creatures to entail the possibility of *eternal* recalcitrance, it will bring into question the freedom and integrity of the inner-trinitarian life. But, since he thinks of hell as an existential experience and not as 'some remote place,'<sup>998</sup> he has the option of allowing creatures to freely choose

<sup>995</sup>Cf. Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 265.

<sup>996</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 214.

<sup>997</sup>Gunton, 'God the Holy Spirit: Augustine and his Successors,' chap. in *Theology Through the Theologians: Selected Essays 1972-1995* (Edinburgh, UK: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1996), 127; cf. also, Gunton, *Triune Creator*, 9-10.

<sup>998</sup>Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 252.

non-being. God, who sustains each creature in the face of the annihilating nothingness, could simply stop repositing their being.

### **INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF MOLTSMANN'S MODEL**

Moltmann's emphasis on God's intimate involvement with all of creation enables a strong emphasis on God's active *presence* in the world. His concept of the openness of the Trinity and the world to each other provides a theological structure for thinking of God's ongoing *interaction* with the world, especially in his forward-looking doctrine of continuing creation and the formation of the eschatological community. But, although he clearly presupposes a doctrine of providence which includes God's preservation and innovation, government and guidance, his rather brief remarks on the subject leaves more to be said about it. While he establishes a structure for providence in his concept of the trinitarian structure of the creative-redemptive-consummative process, the doctrine needs to be more fully explicated.

Moltmann is right to extend the doctrines of creation and providence to include all of creation, thus making human history a subset of the history of all of creation.<sup>999</sup> This accords well with a more contemporary understanding of the interrelatedness of all things. But the success of Moltmann's model in connecting God to the universe is weak in maintaining the distinction between the divine and creaturely, something the more traditional doctrines of creation and providence accomplished in a more explicit fashion.

Treating the issues of providence within the framework of eschatological and trinitarian creation enables him to speak of a goal of history that will only come to it from God in his future advent. God's present work in creation, shaped as it is by God's goal of the eschatological consummation of creation, constitutes a new focus for providence. Although Miroslav Volf argues that in focusing on the category of 'completion' Moltmann has not given sufficient emphasis to redemption,<sup>1000</sup> Moltmann seems to make a legitimate point by arguing that completion, by

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<sup>999</sup>Moltmann, God in Creation, 31, 36.

<sup>1000</sup>Miroslav Volf, 'After Moltmann: Reflections on the Future of Eschatology,' in God Will Be All in All: The Eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann, ed. Richard Bauckham (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1999), 245-252.

definition, *includes* redemption.<sup>1001</sup> Yet there is an important sense in which the focus on completion tends to minimise the significance of human sin, and places sin on an equal footing with transience and contingency, that is, makes it an inherent condition of the history of creation.

But whatever the problems inherent in Moltmann's particular version of panentheism, the points at which he is helpful are as follows. First, trinitarian panentheism places stress on God himself as the context of meaning for all phases and dimensions of life, hence making providential creation an intrinsic aspect of the potentiality, development and meaning of life. This emphasis seems to accord well with a biblical emphasis on God's involvement in human history. Second, emphasis on God's redemptive suffering and solidarity with creation establishes the basis for a profound theodicy. It is especially effective in that it refuses to answer ultimate, speculative questions about 'why' God allows evil, and instead focuses on what God is doing about it. Third, Moltmann's focus on the eschatological future as new creation, achieved by a providentially guided creative process, ensures that hope for and in the future is as sure as God himself. Fourth, the providential movement of creation toward this ultimate goal provides meaning in and significance for, history *in via*. It means that what is achieved now in history can be caught up, on the way, by God's recreative Spirit, and thereby transformed and completed. Fifth, the presence of the creator Spirit as the source of transformative grace extends the work of the Spirit beyond the church and beyond the personal transformation of individual Christians--because the Holy Spirit is the creator Spirit, the very same energy which gives and sustains all of life is employed in transforming all of life. Sixth, the role of the Son in liberating and completing creation, and as the means of the inclusion of humans in the inner-trinitarian life, makes possible ultimate reconciliation and redemption.

The benefit of this re-Christianising of history for a doctrine of providence is that providence now becomes an intrinsic element in this larger story. Providentially guided and empowered, Trinity-world history becomes the context of meaning for all

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<sup>1001</sup>Moltmann, 'Can Christian Eschatology Become Postmodern? Response to Miroslav Volf,' in God Will Be All in All: The Eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann, ed. Richard Bauckham (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1999), 262-263.

of created life. God influences this history from the “inside,” and yet remains eternally transcendent to it. For this reason creation (and therefore the Trinity itself) remains eternally open to the future. In this way hope is supplied on two levels: first, as the completion and consummation of creation which includes the removal of transience, sin and the possibility of sinning; and second, as the creative openness of the new creation. The first level of hope speaks to the human need of redemption, reconciliation and completion; the second to the need for fulfilment through creative expression. In this way also, history itself is redeemed, taken up to a new level, and becomes a feature of the new creation. Thus, providential creation ensures not simply that there will be a future history--that would be only more of the same--but rather it underwrites the hope that there is coming a Sabbath of perfected historical community.

Serious questions remain, however, regarding Moltmann’s model of panentheism. First, in the interest of making the doctrine of the Trinity relevant, has he sacrificed too much of God’s transcendence by making God’s eternal history dependent upon the developments within created history?

Second, while Moltmann insists on maintaining the ontological distinction between Trinity and world, focus on multiple roles of the Spirit toward creation and on the perichoretic nature of all reality gives a preponderance of emphasis to God’s immanence.<sup>1002</sup> Moreover, the role of the Spirit often threatens to eclipse the roles of the Father and Son.<sup>1003</sup>

A third issue involves Moltmann’s universalism: Does universalism allow him to retain the emphasis on human freedom which seems to underlie, for example, his The Trinity and the Kingdom? Moltmann defines God’s freedom and the freedom of created beings as being free to do or communicate the good. But will a single definition of divine and created freedom work? On the one hand, the trinitarian Persons have no beginning, and mutually constitute each other in a more complete manner than do the relationships of a human. To speak of the freedom of

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<sup>1002</sup>Moltmann speaks of the creator Spirit, cosmic Spirit, and the Holy Spirit (God in Creation, 95-98, 98-103, 263).

<sup>1003</sup>Cf. Moltmann’s emphasis on the Spirit’s role as not only the power of life, but as the means of differentiating selves (God in Creation, 100-101).

the triune persons one can only speak of their freedom as constituted by and exemplified in, the eternal act of love, a perfect infinite self-donation.

On the other hand, human persons do have a beginning, will never completely constitute each other in fully mutual self-donation,<sup>1004</sup> and actually go through a process of development before they reach full personhood (which includes self-consciousness and volition). This process clearly entails the possibility of bad choices and wilfully sinful choices, often with evil consequences for innocent bystanders. Both Moltmann and Helm emphasise, therefore, that in the new heaven and earth the possibility of sin and sinning will no longer exist. Redeemed humans will only desire and do the good, just as God does now. For Helm, this is achieved through God's inexorable divine decrees to achieve a certain goal for elect humans. Moltmann does not resort (explicitly) to this type of decretal language, but the effect is the same--in some way (left unexplained) God will irresistibly lure all humans (and even the Devil) to freely love and obey him. And since this clearly does not occur for many before physical death, it implies that at some point *after* death God's love will prove sufficiently illuminating and transforming as to produce the desired salutary effect.

## CONCLUSION

Of the authors reviewed in this thesis, Pannenberg has worked out the most comprehensive trinitarian metaphysics as a context of meaning in which a trinitarian doctrine of providence plays a key role. Although his panentheistic model also carries the potential threat of losing the individual creature and its autonomy, his particular trinitarian metaphysics provides a more adequate basis than Moltmann's for ensuring creaturely otherness in eternity.

Nevertheless, in a trinitarian model of God, Pannenberg and Moltmann are finding resources for a way to think about God in personal and relational terms which are not oppressive, but liberating and constitutive of freedom-in-relation. It is precisely in their explication of the differentiated-unity of the triune being, and the way in which this defines the inner-trinitarian essence in terms of a dynamic fellowship open to the world, that their models of the God-world relationship are

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<sup>1004</sup>Cf. Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 431.



more adequate than Helm's and Sanders' in forming the structure for a Christian doctrine of providence. A question remains, however, especially in Moltmann's model, as to whether his social Trinity treats the triune persons as being persons in the same way.

These two models argue that the Trinity, through the Son (structuring principle) and the Spirit (empowering principle), is open to the creating of others, and subsequently including them within the inner-trinitarian life. Perhaps it would be more appropriate to picture this in terms of the Trinity opening itself to creation, rather than creation being drawn into the inner-trinitarian life. This would better ensure creaturely distinction.

This trinitarian metaphysics accords well with Gilkey's interest in allowing the providentially funded, co-created elements of history a lasting and even developing place in the eternal kingdom. In this way a doctrine of providence serves as a way of grounding the issue of the significance of present creation, or of creation as such, in the overall story of creation history--something which Wiles seems to be aiming for in his model of the creation-preservation of the whole space-time continuum as a single divine act.

The concept of part-whole as a metaphysical structure for creative-providence, as developed especially by Pannenberg, may raise questions of determinism, but it does serve as a fruitful device for instantiating the meaning and significance of what takes place on the way to the eschaton. It also helps to emphasise God's transcendence even while fostering faith in his intimate involvement in the creative sequence. Pannenberg's concept of creative-providence from the future supports the concept of the creation of a-symmetrical, reciprocal relations between God and humans. A further support toward this goal occurs in Moltmann's concepts of open historical process, and eschatological 'completion' in terms of 'correspondence.'

In Pannenberg's and Moltmann's panentheistic, trinitarian models of the God-world relation, the term 'providence' continues to function as an essential expression of God's relationship to the world. It seems that some form of the concept is required if the Trinity's distinction from the world (transcendence) is to be maintained, even while insisting upon the Trinity's active presence (immanence) in

the world. But panentheistic models have a more difficult time maintaining this distinction than do theistic models. In Pannenberg, for example, once there is a world, God's rule and being in some sense depend upon the world. In Moltmann's model, to some degree the inner-constitution of the Trinity includes the Trinity's history with the world.

Both models depend heavily upon the concept of spirit in order to account for God's creative and providential immanence in the world. Pannenberg and Moltmann each work out a view of the Holy Spirit and his role in creation, providence, redemption, and consummation which gives the Spirit special prominence in the Trinity's relation to the world. Thus, Moltmann can speak of the creator Spirit, cosmic Spirit and the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is not only the power of life, but also the means of differentiating selves. For this reason, Moltmann's understanding of the multiple roles of the Spirit tends to eclipse the roles of Father and Son. Pannenberg can speak of the spirit as the impersonal ground of the trinitarian Persons and of creation, and of the Holy Spirit as the personal manifestation of this ground. Pannenberg's concept of spirit as both the field of the trinitarian persons and the creative field out of which and in which the world comes into being seems to blur the distinction between the divine and the created.

Moltmann's model of kenotic creation and providence suffers even more from the threat of absorbing the created into the divine. This may reflect Moltmann's more pragmatic interest in finding ways to express the active presence of God in creation, but it also requires him to work out a more clearly defined metaphysics of the God-world relation which can instantiate an otherness-in-relation ontology. An ontology is required which more fully clarifies the *sui generis* nature of the Trinity while also accounting for how the Trinity, as a differentiated unity, relates to the world in such a way as to establish permanent creaturely otherness from the one triune God.

Pannenberg and Moltmann seem to agree, however, that the basic structure of the inner-trinitarian relations is manifested in the economy through the relation of Jesus Christ to the Father and the Spirit, and that this christological connection models the paradigmatic pattern for all human relations to God. Thus, humans are to

relate *to* the Father *through* the Son *in* the Spirit. Whatever God does for humans in creation, providence, redemption and consummation reflects this structure.

The relationally constituted Trinity becomes the basis for understanding time and eternity as the context for God's providential relation to the world. If God's eternity is defined by, or abstracted from, the inner-trinitarian relations, then it need not be thought of as changeless or static, but itself embodies God's "time," the "time" of the inner-trinitarian relations. Otherwise, one would have to think in terms of absolute eternity circumscribing God. Instead, the dynamic inner life of the triune God defines such categories as substance, subject, space, time and eternity. It is therefore the *quality* of the inner-trinitarian relations that defines their movement and openness, and this quality is love. This is why God's own "future" is *open*--not open to change in the *quality* of relations, but open to change in the *quantity* of relations.

In a similar way, created space and time are defined *internally* by the relations among creatures--*things* matter. In distinction from the *sui generis* relations which constitute the trinitarian persons, humans are defined not only by their horizontal relations, but in addition by their vertical relation to God. This relation to God, while again defining creatures *internally*, is an a-symmetrical relation in its causal effect--creatures are constituted as what they are in ontological dependence upon the Trinity, while the trinitarian persons receive no part of their essence or existence from their relations to creatures, although Moltmann might disagree on this last point. Moreover, in Pannenberg's and Moltmann's models, human relations to the trinitarian persons reflect a unique and differentiated set of relations according to the uniqueness of each trinitarian person. Thus, humans relate to the Father through the Son in the Spirit. It is the vertical relation of the creature to the Trinity (according to this structure) which enables created time, space and human history to be open to the truly new.

The Trinity's mode of existence (eternity) is defined by the absoluteness of the quality of the inner-trinitarian relations: love. This theological metaphysics is the basis for creaturely constitution. In a finite manner, creaturely modes of existence are defined by the quality and properties of creaturely relations, including their relations to the Trinity. Based on these similar relational ontologies, creaturely time can be transcended by the creature, and participate in God's eternity of love.

Therefore, humans already have built into their ontological structure the possibility of participating in God's eternal "time"--according to the limits of their finitude.

The Trinity's "future" is not fixed in the number of possible relations which can be forged with creatures, but is instead an open project--at least from our present time-bound perspective. Pannenberg can say that only from the future will it be decided what God will be. Moreover, in his view, Jesus had a real, contingent history in which the resurrection both revealed and constituted who he was. And Pannenberg also speaks of God cycling back from the future and positing the present.

This perichoretic rhythm of the times, funded by, and redeemed through their cycling through God's "time" (defined as the inner-trinitarian cycle of love relations), provides the ontological or metaphysical basis upon which to understand that God's being is in his becoming. I would qualify this by saying that "becoming," as applied to the Trinity, applies to the *range* of relations that come into existence with the creative-providential process, but *not* to the *absoluteness* of the inner-trinitarian life. Furthermore, in agreement with Moltmann, I would argue that the future must remain *eternally* open, since it is an aspect of the inner-trinitarian relations, and since eternity is already understood to bracket the space-time of creation (Pannenberg's 'true Infinite'<sup>1005</sup>).

On this model of time, as constituted by the relations among entities, and therefore as internal to those relations, providence is given a new orientation to history. History is neither cyclical (and static), nor simply a linear progression, an unfolding of a pre-written plot, but rather embodies kairotic possibilities. Providence itself facilitates the creation of the genuinely new. On this view, eschatology is not the *end* of history or of providence, but precisely the perfecting of creaturely *relationship* with the Trinity. This move toward the perfecting of the *quality* of relating becomes the ever re-newed basis of history. Thus, the eschaton is not so much a "when" (time) or "where" (space) as it is a "what," a quality of existing (eternal Sabbath). In this way one can indeed experience 'teleology now'<sup>1006</sup> as holiness begun, and hope for teleology 'then' as the perfecting of the environment or

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<sup>1005</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 400; cf. *ibid.*, 397-401.

<sup>1006</sup>This phrase is Ruth Page's (*God and the Web of Creation* [London, UK: SCM Press Ltd., 1996], 63-73).

conditions of holy relating (Sabbath). In this way it is possible already to participate in, and exhibit, the quality of the new community as it will exist in the context of the eternal Sabbath. As a being-renewed and re-newing people, it becomes intrinsically impossible to live as if one's new being is waiting ahead, in the eschaton; a Christ-like spirit cannot fail to love its neighbour as itself now. In this way, even the fallen and imperfect structures of this world can be redeemed, made into shelters where the true human spirit can be fostered and from within which it can be creatively extended. In this way providence, as eschatologically oriented grace, working within each human to actualise authentic humanity (defined paradigmatically in Jesus Christ's relation to the Father through the Spirit) has an individual focus but a cosmic scope. Whether one thinks of the eternal Sabbath as influencing the present from "behind," "above," or "ahead," the goal is the same: formation of community between the Trinity and humans.

## CHAPTER 5

### TOWARD A TRINITARIAN DOCTRINE OF PROVIDENCE

#### INTRODUCTION

This final chapter begins by listing problems and issues with a doctrine of providence, as raised in the earlier chapters, and which would need to be addressed by any contemporary work on reconstructing the doctrine. The second section will present a set of suggestions focused around the idea that a trinitarian doctrine of providence, as embodied in a community model of the God-world relation, is a fruitful way to address these problems, especially those questions which have made faith in providence an acute problem, namely, history, meaning and hope. This community model, as a context for a doctrine of providence, will be defined in terms of trinitarian ‘pansyntheism’<sup>1007</sup>

This second section will suggest the use of multiple models of trinitarian divine action as a way of showing that a trinitarian doctrine of providence accords better with contemporary holistic and relational concepts of reality; with the trinitarian nature of divine action in the New Testament; and with a Christian’s personal experience of God’s providence—for example, in prayer, as directed *to* the Father, *through* the Son, *in* the Spirit; in redemption, as mediated through the *Son*; and in the Father’s guidance as provided by the *Holy Spirit*.

The final step in this section will illustrate the heuristic value of this model in addressing the problem of the hiddenness of God and its impact on meaning; in linking a model of providence to personal experiences of grace; in exploring the

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<sup>1007</sup>The term ‘pansyntheism’ was coined by Ruth Page (God and the Web of Creation [London, UK: SCM Press Ltd., 1996], 40).



connections between providence, eschatology, Sabbath and community; and in relating trinitarian providence to human freedom.

### **OUTLINING AN AGENDA FOR A DOCTRINE OF PROVIDENCE**

Although the scope of this thesis precludes detailed discussion of many of the concerns raised for a doctrine of providence in the foregoing chapters, it may be helpful to restate some of them here as a way of acknowledging their importance in constructing a model of providence.

As the foregoing surveys illustrate, one can no longer assume a “traditional” definition of God or of providence. A full monograph on providence would, therefore, require attention to the following points already made in Chapter One: the crisis of confidence in a concept of providence arising out of an increased awareness of widespread evil; loss of faith in progress toward an increasingly better world; belief in radical human autonomy and the contingency of historical development; the privileging of scientific naturalism and rationality; and a disenchantment with the God of Christian Classical Theism.

Subsequent chapters also identified the following concerns and questions to be addressed by a doctrine of providence. Listed in no particular order, they include: the issue of how to define God; how God can be understood as “with” us in the face of his apparent absence; rendering some account of God as personal and as personal agent; giving some account of the widespread criticism raised against Classical Theism for its impersonal and non-relational language in referring to God’s relation to the world; the role of a holistic and relational metaphysics in reconstructing a doctrine of providence; the nature of, and the relation between, time and eternity; the nature of, and the relation between human freedom and divine sovereignty; the role of interpretive models in discerning God’s providential working; the role of faith in discerning God’s providential care; the relation between personal grace, human history and cosmic structures; the relation of a doctrine of providence to the question of meaning in--and of--human lives; the relation of providence to the question of history, that is, as giving history a focus, direction and purpose; the problem of evil and suffering, a key focus of which must include both God’s and humankind’s

relation to the complex and multiple dimensions of the non-human world; and defining a set of criteria for constructing a model of providence.

The issue of criteria raises the question of internal and external coherence in a doctrine of providence, and also the issue of comprehensiveness or scope. External coherence, for example, includes the connections between a doctrine of providence and one's personal experience of grace, with one's understanding of the world as historical,<sup>1008</sup> and of the world as interpreted by modern science.<sup>1009</sup> Internal coherence includes the connections between the doctrine of providence and other key doctrines--creation, redemption, christology, pneumatology, Trinity and eschatology. Integral to these connections is the criterion of comprehensiveness or scope. As Gilkey stressed, a doctrine of providence must maintain both a sense of the overall meaningfulness of history, as well as the value of the individuals who make up that history.<sup>1010</sup> Thus, not only must *individuals* be 'brought back into the permanence and harmony of the divine life,' but also 'the *historical communities* in which humans exist, and whose creations are the work in part of God's providence in history.'<sup>1011</sup> Although not accepting the universalism of Gilkey's view, Pannenberg also stresses that only when seen from the perspective of the end (or whole) of temporal existence does one's life achieve maximal meaning.

Methodologically, therefore, providence, meaning, hope and eschatology are inseparably linked. William Stoeger, for example, argues that 'the eternity of the Trinity is essentially temporal, as long as we understand the essence of temporality in terms of relationality,' that is, 'time' is an emergent reality arising internally from relationships, and thus 'God's eternity is not timelessness nor persistence in being, . . . but rather God's faithfulness in action through God's relationships.' The

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<sup>1008</sup>Cf. Philip Hefner, 'The Continuing Work of Creation,' Fourth Locus: The Creation, in Christian Dogmatics, eds. Carl E. Braaten, and Robert W. Jenson (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1984). Cf. also O. C. Thomas, and E. K. Wondra, Introduction to Theology, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2002), 228-244.

<sup>1009</sup>Cf. William R. Stoeger, S. J., 'God and Time: The Action and Life of the Triune God in the World,' Theology Today 55, no. 3 (October 1998): 365-388.

<sup>1010</sup>Gilkey, Reaping the Whirlwind: A Christian Interpretation of History (New York, NY: The Seabury Press, 1976), 296-297.

<sup>1011</sup>Gilkey, Reaping, 297 (italics mine).

‘internal character of time with respect to person and event means that, . . . time is neither circular nor linear, but rather a “gathering in” of the past and the present into the future.’<sup>1012</sup> Michael Welker defines eternity as the fullness of three kinds of time as these are associated with the triune persons.<sup>1013</sup> Kathryn Tanner reports the traditional view of eschatology as affirming that ‘a gap exists between the results of world processes and the world’s consummation, a gap to be bridged by a God with the power to reverse those results, the power to bring what is otherwise absolutely unexpected into existence--say, a world that knows neither loss nor suffering.’<sup>1014</sup> Moltmann says something similar concerning the grace that transforms, enabling all creation to participate in ‘eternal life as eternal livingness in love,’<sup>1015</sup> to be realised in the ‘kingdom of glory.’<sup>1016</sup> In Moltmann’s view, ‘death is the boundary of our lives, but not the boundary of God’s relationship to us.’ He believes ‘that God’s history with our lives will go on after our [physical] deaths, until that completion has been reached in which a soul finds rest.’<sup>1017</sup> Only in this way can the lives of those who are now dead be said to have meaning, and by implication, the lives of all other humans presently alive in the world.

While one need not embrace the universalism in Gilkey’s, Moltmann’s **and Wiles’** models of providence, together with the other views examined in this thesis they illustrate the fact that comprehensiveness, coherence, scope, and eschatology are intrinsically interrelated, especially as they embrace such key concepts as community, the dimension of the personal, history, meaning and hope. Although the

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<sup>1012</sup>Stoeger, ‘God and Time,’ 376, 375.

<sup>1013</sup>Welker, ‘God’s Eternity, God’s Temporality, and Trinitarian Theology,’ *Theology Today* 55, no. 3 (October 1998): 323-324. Welker’s model will be examined below.

<sup>1014</sup>Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 99. Tanner herself seems to opt for a kind of ‘teleology now’ (the phrase is Ruth Page’s, [*Web of Creation*, 63-73]).

<sup>1015</sup>Moltmann, ‘Is There Life After Death?,’ in *The End of the World and the Ends of God: Science and Theology on Eschatology*, eds. John Polkinghorne, and Michael Welker, *Theology for the Twenty-First Century Series*, eds. Wallace M. Alston, Jr., Robert Jenson, and Don S. Browning (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 246.

<sup>1016</sup>Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London, UK: SCM Press, Ltd.; New York, NY: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., 1981), 212.

<sup>1017</sup>Moltmann, ‘Life After Death?,’ 246, 252.

authors reviewed in the foregoing chapters disagree at many basic points concerning the list of problems associated with a doctrine of providence, they generally agree that the doctrine needs to address this cluster of concepts. It may be helpful, therefore, to summarise their areas of agreement as a way of introducing key themes to be incorporated in the next section.

First, each author has been motivated by a desire to make his or her view of God and God's relation to human history relevant to contemporary Christian experience. Each agrees that this is not a straightforward task, and that the credibility of belief in the Christian God depends upon developing a plausible explanation of God's ongoing relation to the world. Since this sphere of belief traditionally came within the scope of a doctrine of providence, they have interacted with this doctrine as they sought to demonstrate how their model of the Christian God, and of God's relation to the world, enables life to be experienced as history under God's care, and how this model functions as the source of meaning and hope for human life.

For example, in Wiles' neo-Deist model of providence, meaning emerges in the context of humanly constructed religious beliefs within the general parameters of the structures of life. While Gilkey would generally agree with this statement, he posits a more direct assistance from God as humans creatively modify their inherited past and construct new options for the future as these are presented to them by the divine lure. For Paul Helm, the meaning of individual life and history as a whole is fully orchestrated by God. While each human forms an essential part of that story, each is inscribed into a "pre-written" narrative. For Sanders, God establishes the general boundaries of life, and then partners interactively with each human in developing the meaning of his or her life. In the panentheistic models of Pannenberg and Moltmann, God himself forms the context of life, and then partners with humans in constructing the meaning of both their history and God's history. For Pannenberg, in particular, even meaning for God is not fully defined as yet, since even God is determined from the future. In Moltmann's model, the present is especially defined as open to truly new possibilities arriving from the future, but ultimately God will include all humans in the consummation of history in the Kingdom of glory.

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As a description of how God relates to the world, a doctrine of providence must, therefore, be able to link together the doctrines of God, creation, anthropology, soteriology, and consummation.<sup>1018</sup> Moreover, since Christian theology takes as its defining centre some understanding of Jesus Christ, a Christian doctrine of providence needs to relate itself to this centre. Whether or not one formulates it in specifically trinitarian terms, he or she at least needs to give some account of a trinitarian understanding of God.<sup>1019</sup>

A second general point of agreement, therefore, is the paradigmatic role played by Jesus Christ in understanding the nature of God's providential relation to humans as they live out their lives in their historical contexts.<sup>1020</sup> This suggests that an important role might be accorded the biblical account of Christ as an entrance into the question of God's providential care of the world. In the words of C. Norman Kraus, 'In Christ, . . . , God reveals to us what kind of God he really is--what his intention is for human history, how he is at work in the world, and what he expects of us. God does this through a manifestation of his own personal presence and power in Jesus Christ.'<sup>1021</sup> If one takes as the paradigm of God's love and God's relation to the world the incarnation of the Son and the sending of the Spirit, then one has a concrete focus and basis for understanding both the purpose of providence and the power of providence.

Such an approach involves the question of the nature of Jesus Christ as 'God with us,' and what that might mean for a doctrine of providence. God, as 'the compassionate one' normatively revealed 'in Jesus as God's Son,' reveals himself to

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<sup>1018</sup>Cf. William Burt Pope's assertion that 'Providence' is 'the most comprehensive term in the language of theology,' connecting 'the Unseen God with the visible creation, and the visible creation with the work of redemption, and redemption with personal salvation, and personal salvation with the end of all things' (*A Compendium of Christian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., revised and enlarged, vol. 1 [New York, NY: Phillips and Hunt; Cincinnati, OH: Cranston and Stowe, 1880], 456).

<sup>1019</sup>Cf. C. Norman Kraus, *God Our Savior: Theology in a Christological Mode* (Scottsdale, PA; Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1991), 88.

<sup>1020</sup>It is recognised, of course, that there is a wide range of views on the nature of Jesus Christ, but discussion of that point is beyond the scope of the present thesis.

<sup>1021</sup>Kraus, *God Our Savior*, 46.



humans and stands with humans in order to establish relationship and create community with them.<sup>1022</sup>

If, therefore, one accords the Christ-event central hermeneutical priority in understanding providence (as do most of the authors reviewed in this thesis), it suggests that community-formation is God's goal in creation, providence, redemption and consummation. Of course, this also raises once again the question as to whether God is triune, and if so, what the implications might be for providence. Beginning with christology as a point of access in understanding God's providential relation to the world further implies the possibility of finding in soteriology (and also, therefore, in personal experiences of grace<sup>1023</sup>) a central locus for understanding God's providential relation to the world.

Gilkey, however, had noted that while the Old Testament concept of God's providential activity was presupposed in the New Testament, it seemed to be overshadowed by a focus on the 'redemptive activity of God in and through Christ, in the church and to come in the future.'<sup>1024</sup> Helm went a step further, and noted that the history of Jesus provides the paradigmatic *instance* of God's providential care of creation. However, neither Gilkey nor Helm understood the Christ event as providing the hermeneutical key which requires providence to be trinitarian in all its aspects in both the Old and New Testaments. If the approaches of Gilkey and Helm represented all that could be said about providence from a christological (and therefore, trinitarian) perspective, they would raise some question as to whether a *trinitarian* doctrine of providence could in fact claim to have a decisive role in a scripturally informed account of providence. In response to Gilkey's assessment, I have argued instead that it would be more appropriate to think of God's new works of incarnation, redemption, and sanctification, through the Son and the Spirit, as themselves new providential works, a further unfolding of God's purpose for, and

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<sup>1022</sup>Kraus, *God Our Savior*, 94, 50.

<sup>1023</sup>Philip Clayton argues that in the Hebrew Bible 'the Israelites gradually conclude that the one who redeemed and rules them was also the Creator of all that exists' (*God and Contemporary Science*, Edinburgh Studies in Constructive Theology, eds. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, and Philip Clayton (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 25; cf. *ibid.*, 29.

<sup>1024</sup>Gilkey, *Reaping*, 410, n. 4; 241-242.



presence and activity in, history.<sup>1025</sup> As such, even God's Old Testament providential and saving activity is now revealed to have been the work of the triune God--Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As Frank Tupper notes, 'God's [the Trinity's] work of reconciliation illuminates and clarifies God's providential work in the whole of creation and thereby uniquely in the arena of contingent human history.'<sup>1026</sup> Karl Barth earlier had contended that,

if faith in providence is Christian faith, and therefore faith in Jesus Christ as the Word of God and therefore the self-revelation of God, there is for it no obscurity concerning the nature and will and work of the Lord of history, no ambiguity concerning His character and purpose, and no doubt as to His ability to see to His own glory in history.<sup>1027</sup>

Thus, in the New Testament work of redemption, understood as the work of the Trinity achieved through the Father's sending of the Son and pouring out of the Spirit, the divine providential work moves to a new level of intensity, specificity and clarity--it 'restores Creation on a higher plane.'<sup>1028</sup> In the trinitarian work of redemption, not only does the work of the Father in the history of Jesus become the paradigmatic instance of God's general providence (on the order of the story of Joseph in the Old Testament, especially Gen. 50:20), but in addition, God's providence itself comes to be understood in a new light as the differentiated work of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Moreover, although God was understood as personal in the Old Testament, he remained hidden in unapproachable glory.<sup>1029</sup> As Oden states, however, in the New Testament 'a new note was sounded: the teaching of providence became intensely personalized in relation to the history of Jesus,' as evidenced especially in Jesus' references to the 'parental care of' "'Our Father in

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<sup>1025</sup>P. 105, above. Cf. Philip Clayton, Contemporary Science, 60.

<sup>1026</sup>Frank Tupper, 'The Providence of God in Christological Perspective,' Review and Expositor 82, no. 4 (Fall 1985): 580.

<sup>1027</sup>Karl Barth, The Doctrine of Creation, vol. 3, pt. 3, trans. G. W. Bromiley and R. J. Ehrlich, Church Dogmatics (Edinburgh, UK: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1960), 34.

<sup>1028</sup>Leo Scheffczyk, Creation and Providence, trans. Richard Strachan (London, UK: Burns and Oates Limited; New York, NY: Herder and Herder, 1970), 32.

<sup>1029</sup>Cf. Isaiah's experience in the temple (Isa. 6:1-8). Isaiah experienced the common fear that to see God was to die.

heaven.”<sup>1030</sup> The hermeneutical function of christology in relation to a trinitarian view of providence, and the way in which providence is thus personalised, helps both to ground faith in providence in the personal grace and guidance of the Holy Spirit in one’s life,<sup>1031</sup> as well as to link this personal grace (*‘individual providence’*<sup>1032</sup>) with the Trinity’s work in all of creation--past, present and future. This linking, in turn, also enables lessons learned in Old Testament instances of God’s providential acts to be applied in the present.

If all the works of the Trinity in the economy are understood as forming an integrated whole, and are therefore, inclusive of the divine works in both testaments, this implies that a trinitarian doctrine of providence more adequately accounts for that biblical unity by attributing to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit the whole work of the economy.<sup>1033</sup> This is borne out in such verses as Hebrews 1:3 (RSV) which states that the Son was instrumental in the creation of the world and continues to sustain ‘the universe by his word of power.’ This is the same Son/Word/Logos (John 1:1) through whom, and for whom, the world is created, sustained and redeemed (Colossians 1:15-20).<sup>1034</sup> Thomas Oden observes that

*providence* is the term we use to speak of that entire history stretching between creation and consummation that has its central focus in the teaching of redemption. . . . [S]in has a long career, and . . . the divine governance of currently ambiguous moral history must be seen finally in the light of Christ. In this way, the teaching of providence is the central bridge between creation and redemption.<sup>1035</sup>

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<sup>1030</sup>Oden, *The Living God*, vol. 1, *Systematic Theology* (HarperCollins Publishers, Inc, 1987; 1992; Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1998), 307, 308.

<sup>1031</sup>Cf. Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1998), 863, 862.

<sup>1032</sup>Owen Thomas and Ellen Wondra (*Introduction to Theology*, 122-123).

<sup>1033</sup>Cf. Pannenberg, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Edinburgh, UK: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1991), 68; cf. also Thomas Oden, *The Word of Life*, vol. 2, *Systematic Theology* (HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1989, 1992; Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1998), 73.

<sup>1034</sup>Cf. John 1:1-18.

<sup>1035</sup>Oden, *Living God*, 287.

One might say that a trinitarian doctrine of providence provides the hermeneutical key to understanding not only the connection between creation and redemption, but also to the whole creation story. Although in the order of revelation a trinitarian doctrine of providence comes later in the Christian scriptures, precisely as a more complete insight into the nature of God it must function as the grammatical rule under which all earlier understandings of God and God's providence are interpreted. In this way, a trinitarian doctrine of providence can claim to be a more adequate way of understanding a scripturally informed doctrine of providence, especially as it emphasises the trinitarian Persons' roles in this providence. As Gunton argues, there is in this model a mediation of the Father's will and work in providence, but it is through the equally divine and *personal* Son and Spirit, and not through impersonal causal laws or a graded hierarchy of causes.<sup>1036</sup>

As a third general point of agreement, most of the authors in the foregoing survey find themselves in a struggle with Classical Christian Theism and the type of providence traditionally associated with it. In trying to distance themselves from various aspects of the problems and paradoxes associated with the older theism, they endeavour either to show how the problems can be resolved without losing the essential features of the model, or they modify their model of God and the God-world relation. All (except Helm) reject the notion that God is related to the world only in his energies or as active benevolence, if that means that God *in se* remains unaffected by the created domain.

Fourth, all the authors agree that God must be personal, but they do not agree on what that means for either a doctrine of God or of providence. On the one hand, Wiles' and Gilkey's models of the God-world relation at least *look* in the direction of a personal relation between God and humans. However, because in their models personal contact remains at a minimalist level, it amounts to a kind of attenuated "interaction," and does not include interpersonal communication between God and

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<sup>1036</sup>Cf. Gunton, Enlightenment and Alienation: An Essay towards a Trinitarian Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 102, 103; Gunton, The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study, Edinburgh Studies in Constructive Theology (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 176; and Gunton, 'The End of Causality? The Reformers and their Predecessors,' in The Doctrine of Creation: Essays in Dogmatics, History and Philosophy, ed. Colin Gunton (Edinburgh, UK: T. and T. Clark, 1997), 76, 79-80.

humans. On the other hand, Helm, Sanders, Pannenberg and Moltmann insist that God interacts with humans on the level of interpersonal communication. Moreover, interaction on this level functions as a necessary prerequisite for the development of fully human creatures, and for the achievement of God's goal of forming an eschatological community with humans. Insistence on this goal of a divine-human community accounts for the authors' further insistence on God not being less than personal. This goal of *persons-in-community* thus forms the setting for all that God does in the economy, including his providential working.<sup>1037</sup>

Finally, all agree that God must be the ultimate sovereign over creation, that creation has its source and *meaning* in the freedom of God to create or not to create. Belief in the transcendent creator God of Christian theism is necessary in order to provide the *context* in which meaning and hope can emerge out of contingency and novelty. *How* God chooses to manifest that sovereignty is due to his unconstrained decision, that is, unconditioned by anything "outside" of God. However, all agree that "once" God decided to create *this* world, certain logical constraints on the structures of the world came into play. Their understanding of what these constraints consist introduces a critical point at which their models of providence begin to diverge.

Review of these models of providence illustrates major points of concern with a doctrine of providence, as well as points of general agreement about the issues it needs to address. The wide range of issues linked to a doctrine of providence confirms that the doctrine continues to merit serious attempts to retrieve it. While the scope of the present work precludes addressing all of these concerns, nevertheless, a model of God's relation to the world which understands God's primary goal and work to be that of community-building, and which embodies multiple trinitarian models of divine action, will be suggested as a heuristic framework within which to continue discussion of these problems. A narrow

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<sup>1037</sup>Cf. Frank Kirkpatrick's thesis that the ultimate goal of God's acts in history is 'the building up of an inclusive community in which all have become reconciled with all--in which the bonds of love have bound together all of creation and in which God is to be the focus and the source of the mutual celebration of loving communion, ultimately triumphing over the counterforces of evil' (*Together Bound: God, History, and the Religious Community* [Oxford, UK; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994], 142; cf. *ibid.*, 151-152, 165-180).

selection of these difficulties will then be addressed in order to illustrate the heuristic value of the model. The implications of a trinitarian model of providence for the other longstanding problems associated with providence would need to be worked out in subsequent projects.

## **TOWARD A TRINITARIAN DOCTRINE OF PROVIDENCE**

Any suggestions as to possible fruitful directions in constructing a trinitarian model of providence must acknowledge, further to the list of problems and issues noted above, the need for a doctrine of providence that embodies several structures of divine action.

### ***THE NEED FOR A MODEL OF PROVIDENCE***

According to Niels Gregersen, the rich, polyvalent language associated with providence, taken in conjunction with a coherence theory of truth and the fact that ‘empirical arguments’ cannot either confirm or refute claims to knowledge of God’s providential actions, mean that any particular doctrine of providence must function as an explanatory model as it incorporates ‘the “whole of [one’s] experience.”’<sup>1038</sup> In other words, because a doctrine of providence is so closely linked to a particular understanding of God, of God’s relation to and action in the world, and since the debate about the certainty and shape of this knowledge of God and God’s action is beyond any final resolution,<sup>1039</sup> one must be prepared to accept a certain amount of ambiguity in a doctrine of providence.<sup>1040</sup> This is the place for faith as it incorporates an interpretive model of providence.

An appeal to faith need not be seen as a retreat into obscurantism and fideism. The requirement of faith is part of the doctrine of providence itself, since faith involves having good reasons for a full commitment to the God behind the hidden

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<sup>1038</sup>Niels Henrik Gregersen, ‘Providence in an Undeterministic World,’ *CTNS Bulletin* 14, no. 1 [Winter 1994], 19, 18.

<sup>1039</sup>Cf. Gregersen, ‘Providence,’ 19-20. Cf. also J. Wentzel van Huyssteen on the similarity of rationality between science and theology as they conceptualise and make ‘reliable truth claims’ about dimensions of reality beyond one’s experience (*Theology and the Justification of Faith: Constructing Theories in Systematic Theology*, trans. H. F. Snijders [Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989], 156).

<sup>1040</sup>Cf. Kirkpatrick, *Together Bound*, 160-163.



workings of providence. John Puddefoot insists that both scientists and theologians seek evidence to support theories, not to refute doubt--although the stronger the evidence for the theory the weaker the doubt.<sup>1041</sup> Nancey Murphy and Frank Kirkpatrick have argued similarly that in order for faith-claims of experience or knowledge of God's providential action in the world to be rational, one needs to have in place a model of divine action which incorporates a set of beliefs about the divine care.<sup>1042</sup> For faith in providence to be rational, therefore, it must incorporate a *model* of providence which clarifies its understanding of this care, and which specifies what counts as confirmation of belief in providence. Such a model of God's comprehensive relation to the world is especially important when interpreting the *meaning* of one's life as lived *coram Deo*, since humans have, at best, only partial epistemic access to God's workings and purposes.<sup>1043</sup>

Although beyond the scope of the present project, a full monograph on providence would, therefore, need to be developed as a system of doctrinal components within a master MODEL of the God-world relation--for example, the formation of a divine-human *community*.<sup>1044</sup> This is due in part to the fact that, although confidence in providence has often been reduced to the level of personal experiences of grace, one cannot restrict discussion of it to this sphere, because

<sup>1041</sup>Puddefoot, 'Response by John Puddefoot,' in *Science and Theology*, eds. Murray Rae, Hilary Regan, and John Stenhouse (Edinburgh, UK: T. and T. Clark Ltd.; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 142; cf. Diogenes Allen's argument, following Austin Farrer, that 'one is *first* to have faith in order to be in a position to recognise the manifestation of divine activity in nature, history, and individual lives' ('Faith and the Recognition of God's Activity,' in *Divine Action: Studies Inspired by The Philosophical Theology of Austin Farrer*, eds. Brian Hebblethwaite, and Edward Henderson [Edinburgh, UK: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1990], 198).

<sup>1042</sup>Murphy, 'Does Prayer Make a Difference,' in *Cosmos as Creation: Theology and Science in Consonance*, ed. Ted Peters (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 235-245; Kirkpatrick, *Together Bound*, 148-150.

<sup>1043</sup>Cf. Helm, *The Providence of God*, in *Contours of Christian Theology*, series ed., Gerald Bray (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 163, 62, 141, 228-230; cf. also Kirkpatrick, *Together Bound*, 152.

<sup>1044</sup>In order to distinguish between the different levels of models being referred to in the following discussion, hereafter 'MODEL' will refer to the overarching model or goal of the God-world relation, understood in terms of divine-human community. Models of divine work (creation, providence, redemption, consummation), and models of the trinitarian *structure* of those works, will be referred to with a lower case use of 'model.'



personal grace and history are linked to wider social and cosmic structures.<sup>1045</sup> A holistic and relational metaphysics requires one to develop a theology of providence which corresponds to God's encompassing of the whole of the history of creation.<sup>1046</sup> Frank Tupper correctly notes that 'the complexity and scope' of the problems and issues associated with providence point to 'the conclusion that providence is not so much a discrete locus of doctrine as a comprehensive symbol [or model] for the question of the relationship of God, the world, and human history.'<sup>1047</sup> As such, one would need to make clear the reasons for the standpoints assumed, as intrinsic elements in his or her larger theological model, on certain key issues: for example, how the Christian scriptures are utilised as a source of data in theological construction; one's perspective on such issues as 'divine sovereignty and human freedom, radical evil and the goodness of creation, petitionary prayer and the availability of God, the meaning of life and the mystery of death'<sup>1048</sup>; the nature of God's foreknowledge, and the nature of, and relation between, eternity and time; how the world, as interpreted through modern scientific disciplines, can be understood as open to the divine care; the character of divine action; and one's understanding of God, for example, as Trinity. It would be necessary, therefore, to offer some account of one's position on these and other issues (as listed above) if one's doctrine of providence, as an interpretative grid for finding and making meaning out of life, is to have rational plausibility and existential credibility. A doctrine of providence will, therefore, self-consciously incorporate particular assumptions about God, the world, and human history.

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<sup>1045</sup>Cf. Polkinghorne, *Serious Talk: Science and Religion in Dialogue* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995), 88, 86; and idem, Polkinghorne (*One World: The Interaction of Science and Theology* (London, UK: SPCK, 1986; First Princeton Paperback printing, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987) 84-85, 89-92).

<sup>1046</sup>Cf. Owen Thomas' and Ellen Wondra's comment that 'the difficulties [with a doctrine of providence] derive from the fact that providence is the doctrine that asserts most comprehensively God's present relation to the world' (*Introduction to Theology*, 122).

<sup>1047</sup>E. Frank Tupper, *A Scandalous Providence: The Jesus Story of the Compassion of God* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995), 7. Cf. Edward Farley's almost identical statement in his review of *Reaping the Whirlwind: A Christian Interpretation of History*, by Langdon Gilkey, in *Religious Studies Review* 4, no. 4 (October 1978): 233.

<sup>1048</sup>Tupper, *Scandalous Providence*, 7.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR A TRINITARIAN MODEL OF PROVIDENCE**

One of the working assumptions in this thesis has been that the Christian God is triune. As argued in Chapter One above, the ecumenical creeds and the New Testament documents have provided the basis for this understanding.<sup>1049</sup> If accepted, this doctrine entails that all of God's works *ad extra* are trinitarian, even if such works are in some way *undivided* (Augustine; Aquinas<sup>1050</sup>). This appears to be especially so in the work of redemption, where the *trinitarian* nature of the divine work *ad extra* seems to be most clearly demonstrated. If redemption, in turn, is then understood as an integral part of a larger story, then the organic unity of all God's works *ad extra* implies that similar trinitarian distinctions apply to all the divine works in the creative sequence.

On this view, *trinitarian* creation, providence, redemption and consummation forms the theological structure for thinking about God's presence in, and care of, the world, and therefore provides the context for understanding the world's theological meaning and hope. It then becomes necessary to think of providence as one important link in the *Trinity's* project of creation, redemption and consummation.

Two basic criteria seem to impose themselves on such an enterprise: first, to develop a model of providence which remains faithful to the triune nature of God, and second, doing so in such a way that the resulting trinitarian doctrine of providence actually facilitates the retrieval and reconstruction of providence in a credible fashion. Although this type of theological project privileges key Christian views about God and the nature of the world in constructing a doctrine of providence, this prioritising should not be taken to imply a naïve discounting of contemporary scientific understandings of the world.

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<sup>1049</sup> Cf. Edmund J. Fortman, The Triune God: A Historical Study of the Doctrine of the Trinity, Theological Resources, eds. John P. Whalen, and Jaroslav Pelikan (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster; London: Hutchinson and Co. [Publishers] Ltd., 1972), 1-35; cf. also Thomas Torrance's, The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church (Edinburgh, UK: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1988), 2; and Ingolf U. Dalferth: '[T]he conviction that the "doctrine of the Trinity simply is the Christian doctrine of God" seems to be one of the least contentious claims among Christian theologians today' ('The Eschatological Roots of the Doctrine of the Trinity,' in Trinitarian Theology Today: Essays on Divine Being and Act, ed. Christoph Schwöbel (Edinburgh, UK: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1995), 147.

<sup>1050</sup> Cf. Leo Scheffczyk, Creation and Providence, trans. Richard Strachan (London, UK: Burns and Oates Limited; New York, NY: Herder and Herder, 1970), 147.

Discussion about the role of models in understanding providence also raises the problem of the limitations of any one model. It might be more helpful, therefore, to work in terms of a master MODEL of the God-world relation which encompasses not only a doctrine of providence, but also *multiple* models or structures of divine action. John McIntyre adopted a somewhat similar method in elucidating the complexities of the concept of the love of God. He created a model of God's love composed of 'a constellation' of six terms representing the dynamic variety in God's 'attributes, . . . actions, operations, purposes, relations and attitudes': 'Love is Concern, Commitment, Communication, Community, Involvement, Identification, Response and Responsibility.' No one term is adequate by itself, but rather, 'each has a quite separate contribution to make.'<sup>1051</sup> As Kevin Vanhoozer points out, this is a more adequate approach than Brümmer's single 'overarching relational model' in which love is "'a relationship of free mutual give and take.'<sup>1052</sup>

The present thesis will employ an analogous method in depicting the trinitarian structure of the divine acts *ad extra*. Since no one model fully captures the complexity of this structure in the works of creation, providence, redemption and consummation, this thesis will incorporate key elements from multiple models of trinitarian divine action.

Accepting that God is triune, then all levels of the Trinity's relations to the world embody a trinitarian structure. The master MODEL for this relation is that of a divine-human community. The means to achieving that overarching goal or project include the divine works of creation, redemption and consummation. The work of providence can be understood as the unifying thread which ensures that these works form the single whole which will achieve the overall goal.

## Community as a Context for Providence

A doctrine or model of providence not only describes key aspects of God's ongoing relation to the world, but it also implies a purpose behind that relation which

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<sup>1051</sup>John McIntyre, *On the Love of God* (London, UK: Collins, 1962), 35, 37.

<sup>1052</sup>Vanhoozer, 'Introduction: The Love of God,' in *Nothing Greater, Nothing Better: Theological Essays on the Love of God*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Cambridge, UK; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 23, 18.

gives the doctrine greater significance. Deciding what that purpose is helps to define what one understands the shape and role of providence to be. This is where it is helpful to think of a doctrine of providence within a more comprehensive MODEL of the God-world relation.

As noted by several of the authors in this thesis, the loving personal God of Christian theism has a purpose in creating this world which goes beyond giving creatures existence. Many of these authors have insisted that this goal is best understood in terms of God forming community with free creatures, both in present history by the work of the Spirit, and especially in the eschaton through a completing of the created other. Allowing and enabling humans to participate in finite forms of the divine freedom and personhood while remaining in solidarity with the rest of creation, ensures that all aspects of creation can participate in the glory of God.<sup>1053</sup>

Such a view correlates well with a view of both created and divine realities as characterised by relationality.<sup>1054</sup> Moltmann and Pannenberg, for example, have utilised personal and relational categories in order to form a new metaphysics. Denis Edwards agrees with this move, suggesting that ‘the basic metaphor for the trinitarian God . . . is not *actus purus* but persons-in-communion.’<sup>1055</sup>

Stanley Grenz has also used a community concept within which to develop a theology of God’s eschatological purposes being worked out through his providential relation to the world.<sup>1056</sup> Adopting a community MODEL as the context for the

<sup>1053</sup>Cf. Gunton, Triune Creator, 197.

<sup>1054</sup>Cf. Polkinghorne, Serious Talk, 88, 86; Moltmann, ‘Perichoresis: An Old Magic Word for a New Trinitarian Theology, in Trinity, Community and Power: Mapping Trajectories in Wesleyan Theology, ed. M. Douglas Meeks (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, An Imprint of Abingdon Press, 2000), 113, 117; William Stoeger, ‘God and Time,’ 365-388; cf. also, LaCugna, God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991; Harper Collins Paperback edition, 1993), 168.

<sup>1055</sup>Denis Edwards, ‘The Discovery of Chaos and the Retrieval of the Trinity,’ In Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., eds. Robert John Russell, Nancey Murphy, and Arthur Peacocke, A series on ‘Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action,’ ed. Robert John Russell (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications; Berkeley, CA: The Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 1997,) 159-160, 165.

<sup>1056</sup>Grenz, Theology for the Community of God (Carlisle, U.K.: The Paternoster Press; n.p., USA: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1994), 147-151.



providential purposes of the God-world relation, it can function as a heuristic device for discussing many of the problems with a doctrine of providence.

While the parameters of this thesis does not allow for a full development of a particular community MODEL as a context for a doctrine of providence, it is necessary to specify a few qualifications for such a MODEL, as well as state a minimal set of assumptions for it.

Certain qualifications need to be observed when talking about a concept of community when it includes a relationship between the divine and the created. First, the inner-trinitarian life, referred to in some social doctrines of the Trinity as a 'community of love,' needs to be carefully qualified if it is not to imply tri-theism.

Second, in whatever analogous way the concept of 'community' is applied to the inner-trinitarian life, its application to the formation of human community will imply a different understanding of the term 'persons' as constituents of that community than when the same term is used of the divine Persons. As Pannenberg points out, for example, while the trinitarian Persons can be thought of as fully constituted in and through their relations to each other, human personhood or identity 'is not so exclusively constituted by the relation to one or two other persons as it is in the trinitarian life of God.' Moreover, 'in the case of human personality the identity of the person is never fully or exclusively defined by the relation to the other, in human self-awareness the human I and the human self are different.'<sup>1057</sup> Thus, the concept of relational constitution being assumed here is more limited than Polkinghorne's and Moltmann's thorough-going relational ontologies which seem to include some degree of mutual constitution between divine and human being.

Moreover, I accept Harriet Harris' caution that it is important to distinguish between the 'numerical identity' of a person (which does not change as a result of relationships), and changes in that person's 'personality' or character as a result of his or her particular set of relationships.<sup>1058</sup> As Harris argues, if one is constituted as a person (identity) *exclusively* through one's relationships to others, then it is hard to affirm the 'continuity of personal identity'--even though one can allow for the quality

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<sup>1057</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 431.

<sup>1058</sup>Harriet Harris, 'Should We say that Personhood is Relational?,' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 51, no. 2 (1998): 218; cf. *ibid.*, 232-234.

or character of that person to undergo development and change through the influence of relationships to other entities.<sup>1059</sup> One may also accept John Zizioulas' argument that only because a human being has its constitution in the free creative and sustaining act of God, as mediated through the Son, does it have continuing givenness or identity and, therefore, a basis from which to form relations, and through those relations come to be recognised as person.<sup>1060</sup> Thus, Harris suggests that while persons are inherently relational and that 'relationships . . . [are] essential to our development,' personhood itself does not arise *from* relations.<sup>1061</sup> If humans relate to the Father by participating--on a finite level--in the Son's filial relation to the Father, it is precisely this structure of being as established from *outside* the human person which ensures the enduring identity of the person as a unique entity over time. By definition the divine-human relationship is a-symmetrical: God first posits in being the human and then, while sustaining that being and cooperating with its activities, God establishes personal relationship with the human. This personal relationship has traditionally been constituted within the framework of covenant communities such as the church and the kingdom of God. For the purposes of this thesis, therefore, use of the concept of relationality in the context of divine-human community focuses on the qualitative transformation engendered by that personal fellowship, rather than on the constitution of human being as such.

Third, therefore, when speaking of the Trinity forming community with humans, the distinction between divine and human ontologies must be respected if, on the one hand, humans are not to be subsumed into the inner-trinitarian life (divinised), or on the other hand, the trinitarian Persons are not to be reduced to super-humans. While the principle of otherness-in-relation may formally be applied to the relations of the triune persons with each other, to the relations of the Trinity to humans, and to the relations between humans, its material content in each case will

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<sup>1059</sup>Harris, 'Personhood is Relational?,' 222 (*italics mine*).

<sup>1060</sup>Zizioulas, 'On Being a Person. Towards an Ontology of Personhood,' in *Persons, Divine and Human*, eds. Christoph Schwöbel, and Colin E. Gunton, King's College Essays in Theological Anthropology [Edinburgh, UK: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1991], 41-46). Cf. Harris' similar point ('Personhood is Relational?,' 229).

<sup>1061</sup>Harris, 'Personhood is Relational?,' 229, 224-227.



differ with respect to the differences of the underlying ontologies of the members forming the community. The Trinity is not like a group of three friends that opens their circle of friendship to include humans. Rather, humans relate to each of the three divine Persons in a different way. The 'highly differentiated threefold relationship' that humans have with the Trinity means that 'true human community comes about not as an image of the trinitarian fellowship, but as the Spirit makes us like Jesus in his community with the Father and with others.'<sup>1062</sup> Moreover, while humans are fully constituted as such by the ontological and personal relations of the divine to the human, the triune being of God does not depend upon the human for its identity or completeness.<sup>1063</sup>

Minimally stated, the kind of community God is seeking to establish is 'a redeemed people, living within a renewed creation, . . . enjoying the presence of their God,' 'fellowship with each other, and harmony with all creation.'<sup>1064</sup> This description corresponds to Moltmann's concept of the eschatological Sabbath, expressed in terms of the Kingdom of Glory in which 'God will be all in all.' Frank Kirkpatrick's definition of community is also apropos: it is 'a model of personal relationships in which the unique gifts of each person are celebrated and nurtured, and in which the celebration and nurturing of others are the primary intentions of all the members,' that is 'a community of genuine and full mutuality.'<sup>1065</sup> Such a community, made possible by the trinitarian event of the incarnation and resurrection, takes the form of a 'messianic community' in the present and the fully realised kingdom of God in the eschaton.<sup>1066</sup>

<sup>1062</sup>Bauckham, 'Jürgen Moltmann's *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* and the Question of Pluralism,' in *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: Theological Essays on Culture and Religion*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 161.

<sup>1063</sup>Cf. Gunton, 'God the Holy Spirit: Augustine and his Successors,' chap. in *Theology Through the Theologians: Selected Essays 1972-1995* (Edinburgh, UK: T. and T. Clark, 1996), 127, 128.

<sup>1064</sup>Grenz, *Theology for the Community*, 148, 151.

<sup>1065</sup>Kirkpatrick, *Together Bound*, 169, 166; cf. also, Miroslav Volf, "'The Trinity is our Social Program": The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement,' *Modern Theology* 14 (July 1998): 403-423.

<sup>1066</sup>Kraus, *God Our Savior*, Chap. 6.

The workings of providence, therefore, are best seen in the context of the Trinity's creative-eschatological purpose, that is, as the purposeful energy behind the formation of divine-human community. This comprehensive perspective can incorporate the concept of a perichoretic relationship between the created times, and between time and eternity.<sup>1067</sup> It also relates to God's sovereignty over the whole creative project, a sovereignty which grants the whole its ultimate unity as a single project, and which in turn gives providence and the concept of history a cohesiveness, agenda and meaning.<sup>1068</sup> In the same way that theodicy must not be thought of apart from eschatology (Pannenberg), so also providence must not be thought of apart from the creative-redemptive-consummative sequence.<sup>1069</sup> As in Moltmann's and Pannenberg's theologies, God's paradigmatic revelation in Christ of his eschatological identity with, and redemption of, fallen humanity forms the hermeneutical key to God's present providential working.<sup>1070</sup> God is working to form the kingdom of God, to establish his rule within his creation, and part of this project includes working through his subjects, not dominating, but empowering.<sup>1071</sup>

Providence, therefore, is one aspect of a much larger trinitarian positing of, and movement toward, the world. It is much more than the sustaining of an initial creation. It is, rather, an expression of the living and active presence of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the different dimensions of their relations to the world (creative, providential, soteriological), aimed at creating Christ-like others for community. Although labels can be limiting, such a wide-ranging scope of divine activities as accorded to a doctrine of providence merits some attempt at revising nomenclature.

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<sup>1067</sup>Cf. Moltmann, God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation, trans. Margaret Kohl, The Gifford Lectures, 1984-1985 (SCM Press Ltd., 1985), 126-139; and Laurence Wood, 'Does God Know the Future? Can God be Mistaken?: A Reply to Richard Swinburne,' Asbury Theological Journal 56, no. 2; 57, no. 1 (Fall 2001; Spring 2002): 5-47.

<sup>1068</sup>Cf. Thomas Oden, Living God, 182.

<sup>1069</sup>Cf. Gunton, 'End of Causality?', 81; and Gunton, The Promise of Trinitarian Theology, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Edinburgh, UK: T. and T. Clark, 1991, 1997), 203.

<sup>1070</sup>Cf. Tanner, Jesus and Humanity, 5; Oden, Living God, 182; Gunton, Triune Creator, 177-178, 190, 192, 202, 223; and Tupper, Scandalous Providence, 3.

<sup>1071</sup>Cf. Tanner, God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment? (New York, NY; Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1988), 89-90. It should be noted here that the kingdom model can be supplemented with other models such as those of the church and of the body of Christ.

## Defining Providence in Terms of Trinitarian Pansyntheism

The dilemma of a doctrine of providence centres in an intriguing but troubling tension: on the one hand it claims that God is intimately with us; on the other hand it makes this claim in the face of a bewildering sense of the absence of God. For this reason a doctrine of providence seems to embody, if not a contradiction, at least a profound paradox. As Ruth Page expresses it, on the one hand, God's relationship with creation entails a strong sense of God's 'letting-be,' and on the other hand it ensures God's 'loving presence' with each dimension of creation. Page has coined a term to encompass this dual emphasis: 'pansyntheism.'<sup>1072</sup> While no aspect of the world is "outside" 'the divine presence,' neither is the world subsumed into God. Rather, the emphasis on "'God *with* everything'" highlights the distinction of the world from God even as the world depends on God for its existence.<sup>1073</sup> While Page does not understand God to be an ontological Trinity, formally at least, the dynamic of otherness-in-relation embodied in 'pansyntheism' corresponds to the trinitarian ontology and activity advocated here.

Traditional labels such as Deism, Classical Theism, Panentheism, Process Theism, Pantheism, and the more recent Open Theism, each try to capture some key aspect of the God-world relation. Often it is a matter of finding a balance between two extremes, or of highlighting what is considered an essential (and perhaps neglected) feature of the relationship.<sup>1074</sup> The present thesis suggests that the term 'pansyntheism' can be adapted to express the overarching MODEL of the divine-human community. It captures succinctly in a single term the ontological structure of relation-in-otherness; it expresses the key idea of the trinitarian event of the incarnation: Immanuel, God *with* us, as the biblical interpretation of the significance of the incarnation; and it allows for an absolute and universal dependence of the non-divine upon the triune God for being, and yet reflects the true identity-in-distinction structure of divine-human relations.

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<sup>1072</sup>Page, Web of Creation, 40.

<sup>1073</sup>Page, Web of Creation, 40-41 (italics mine).

<sup>1074</sup>The fact that each of these models can claim to speak of God's *relation* to the world illustrates the ambiguity of the term, especially as used in reference to God. Michael Welker critiques this concept as being 'completely vague' ('God's Eternity,' 319, n. 2).

For example, when linked to the differentiated trinitarian relation to the world, it does a better job than either Classical Theism or panentheism in assuring that God has real relations to the world. God's eternity can bracket, embrace and interact with the times of temporally and spatially defined creatures, as manifested in the incarnation of the Son and the work of the Spirit. Phillip Clayton argues, however, that *panentheism* does a better job than Classical Philosophical Theism in modelling God's relation to the world. In panentheism, 'God includes the world within himself, although God is also more than the world. By contrast, Classical Philosophical Theism holds that God is fully distinct from the world, though present to it.' Although the two positions have similarities, Clayton argues that 'there may be a *greater* resonance between panentheism and key tenets of the biblical account of God's relation to the world than there is between that account and CPT.'<sup>1075</sup> But panentheism is primarily an ontological category (implying a focus on ontological continuity between God and the world), whereas pansyntheism brings into focus the mutual *withness* of qualitatively (ontologically) *distinct* entities. On the human side, the distinctness is ensured by *graced participation* (not merger) in the *relation* of the *otherness* of the Son from and to the Father, as enabled by the Spirit. Precisely because the Father can be present *to* us by being *in* us through the Spirit and *with* us as the Son, his transcendent-immanent, differentiated care and guidance is personal, and always values human otherness. Thus, pansyntheism better accommodates a *personal* relation between God and humans without divinising humans.

This personal relation with the triune God, as a result of the incarnation, is given a concrete reference in the divine-human Christ. Jesus Christ is 'God with us' in a unique and concrete way. This unique *personal intimacy* and *withness* is not lost to us when Christ ascends to the Father, since he and the Father send 'another

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<sup>1075</sup>Clayton, 'The Case for Christian Panentheism,' *Dialog* 37, no. 3 (Summer 1998): 202. Cf. Thomas Finger's argument that traditional trinitarian theism can more adequately instantiate otherness-in-distinction than panentheistic models ('Trinity, Ecology and Panentheism,' *Christian Scholar's Review* 27, no. 1 [Fall 1997]: 90-96).

Comforter.<sup>1076</sup> Moreover, with the outpouring of the Spirit, Christ is actually said to be 'in you' through the Spirit being 'in you.'<sup>1077</sup>

The term 'pansyntheism,' therefore, has the flexibility to express the characteristics of intimacy, pervasiveness, concern, power, wisdom, patience, adaptability, faithfulness, levels of complexity and different types of relationship, longsuffering, and the commitment of God's covenantal presence *with*, or *alongside* each entity. God's *withness* with each element of creation is as varied and rich as the creation itself, and as dynamic as the inner-trinitarian relations. For humans, it involves a universal creative/preservational component (the Father's love and will as mediated through the Son and Spirit), a universal soteriological potential in the re-creative redemption provided by the Son and as made available in the form of renewing grace through the Spirit, and a universal possibility of form (identity/personality formation) and community with the Trinity through the Son and Spirit. For this reason creation, salvation and consummation must be thought together, and a trinitarian doctrine of providence forms the link making that possible. Pansyntheism emphasises God's intentional presence and interaction with each element of creation, his *active engagement* in both their continued existence *and* in their activities--a mode of presence traditionally referred to under the categories of 'concursus' and 'special providence.' 'Concursus' can be given an impersonal interpretation, but 'special providences' better captures the personal nature of the God-world relation,<sup>1078</sup> especially as revealed in the experience of 'God with us' in Christ and the Spirit.

Pansyntheism, therefore, accords well with the all-encompassing structure of trinitarian providence. The structure of trinitarian love ensures all three divine Persons are equally involved in every moment of human life, albeit, in different ways. The otherness-in-unity that defines the inner-trinitarian love becomes the structure through which, in the Son, humans participate in that love.

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<sup>1076</sup>Cf. John 14:16-17, 25; 15:26; 16:7 (RSV).

<sup>1077</sup>Romans 8:9-11 (RSV).

<sup>1078</sup>Owen Thomas and Ellen Wondra prefer the more personal categories '*historical* and *individual providence*' over 'the traditional concepts of *general* and *special providence*' (Introduction to Theology, 122-123).



God relates to creation as loving providence forming a divine-human community. Formation of such a community requires the space and time<sup>1079</sup> for humans to develop true otherness after the pattern of the Son relating to the Father. Such a model can appreciate Wiles' concern for true creaturely independence, but one need not stop with the establishment of independence as an end in itself. Wiles' model accentuates the quality of the unitive "moment" of the creative act in which space and time are given to creatures to become *independent* others. However, because his model sees independence as the *ultimate* goal of the creative act, it cannot account for a more personal and interactive relationship between God and the emergence of creaturely others as *an essential part of the process of becoming an other*.

Gilkey's model moves further in this direction, with his concept of God's universal and resourceful 'lure.' His model also gives a more holistic account of God's creative project in that what has its partial and incomplete beginning in this life is extended into, and perfected by, life after death--although Gilkey remains vague about this. A question which arose for both Gilkey's and Moltmann's model at this point, however, was whether their universalism adequately accounts for the true independence granted to humans. This universalism seems to derive in part from God's choice to be constituted, at least in part, by his relations with the world. This relational ontology between the divine and human, even if it remains asymmetrical in degree, fails to recognise the distinction between divine and human being, and also the distinction between human identity and human personality (Harris). Perhaps for the same reasons, Gilkey's model also lacks a truly personal interaction with God because the 'lure' operates at some level below the conscious. It would seem that Pannenberg is more consistent here in maintaining the true created otherness and identity of humans such that they can make a real choice, on the level of personal relations, to choose *not* to participate in the Son's relationship with the Father.

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<sup>1079</sup>Cf. Gunton, *Triune Creator*, 142, 173, 188-189, 192. Cf. also Robert Jenson, 'Time, Created Being, and Space,' chap. in *The Works of God*, vol. 2, *Systematic Theology* (Oxford, UK; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999).



If one conceives of God as the trinitarian Persons of Father, Son and Holy Spirit (as do Helm, Sanders, Pannenberg and Moltmann), this further complicates the question of how each is “person,” and how the *triune persons* sustain, govern and provide redemption for the world.

One of the problems noted in Chapters Three and Four had to do with how to account for the apparent “overlap” of the work of the trinitarian Persons: for example, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are each involved in the creative act; both Son and Spirit sustain the universe; both Father and Son speak the sustaining word.<sup>1080</sup> This problem was resolved by Augustine through the doctrine of appropriations and the formula, *opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*. It was noted, however, that this remedy has not always adequately accounted for the significance of the distinctions between the trinitarian roles in the economy, especially if these differences are thought of as reflecting distinctions within the triune godhead.<sup>1081</sup>

This leads to the question of how to develop a trinitarian doctrine of providence which respects these distinctions without, on the one hand, separating the triune persons into three gods, or on the other hand, treating the divine works *ad extra* as the work of an undifferentiated single divine essence (a problem in Helm’s and Sanders’ models of providence). The suggestion being adopted here is to extrapolate from the divine works in the economy the unique role of each of the divine persons<sup>1082</sup> and the trinitarian structures of divine action, which in turn can inform the shape of a trinitarian doctrine of providence. It is the complexity and variety of this trinitarian structure which the following section will attempt to address.

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<sup>1080</sup>Heb. 1:3 (RSV).

<sup>1081</sup>Cf. Pannenberg, Chapter Four above, ‘The Trinity-World Relation.’

<sup>1082</sup>This is the approach adopted by Moltmann and Pannenberg; Catherine LaCugna (*God For Us*, 13, 168-169); Thomas Finger (‘Trinity, Ecology and Panentheism,’ 74-98); Robert Jenson, (*The Triune God*, vol. 1, *Systematic Theology* [Oxford, UK; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997], 60, chap. 4); and Gary Badcock (*Light of Truth and Fire of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* [Cambridge, UK; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997], 253-256). This is, however, an appropriate place to acknowledge Gunton’s concern that one not grant so much weight to the economic distinctions among the trinitarian roles that the creative act is seen to actually *constitute* the trinitarian being of God, as implied in Moltmann’s model of the Trinity (cf. Gunton, *Promise*, xvii-xix).

## Trinitarian Structures of Divine Action

In order to respond to these challenges, five models will be presented as ways of thinking about the structure of trinitarian action in the world. These models do not represent an exhaustive list of options, but serve rather to illustrate complementary ways of picturing the structure of trinitarian providential action enabling the formation of a divine-human community. Neither are the five structures of divine action intended as remedies for scientific problems with providence, nor as resolutions of such philosophical problems as the relation between divine sovereignty and human freedom. They serve instead to point toward theological conceptions of divine action which correspond more closely with the Christian doctrine of God as triune. Nevertheless, such theological models of divine action should correspond better with modern scientific perceptions of the world when it is thought of as an integrated, relational whole, and they should provide a heuristic framework within which to think about the sovereignty/freedom issue.

### Palamas'/Aquinas' Sequential-Uniqueness Model

As noted in Chapter Three above, although Helm and Sanders both assume a doctrine of the Trinity, they treat God's creative, providential and redemptive work as if it were the work of a single divine essence, thus ignoring the New Testament's emphasis on the distinctions between the roles of the trinitarian persons. The first version of trinitarian divine action summarised here begins to address that issue, and is based on Bruce Marshall's interpretation of Gregory Palamas' and Thomas Aquinas' understanding of the unique identity of each of the divine persons, and the distinctions between their roles in the economy.<sup>1083</sup>

Palamas and Aquinas agree that 'the actions of the Trinity . . . are common to the persons of the Trinity,' just as is the 'one numerically identical (οὐσιᾶ).' However, this emphasis on 'the undivided character of God's actions *ad extra* seems to make it difficult or impossible for those actions to display the distinctions between

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<sup>1083</sup>Bruce D. Marshall, 'Action and Person: Do Palamas and Aquinas Agree About the Spirit?', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (1995): 379-408. Cf. also, Gerald O'Collins, S.J., on the Thomistic understanding of the differentiated unity of the divine actions *ad extra* (*The Tripersonal God: Understanding and Interpreting the Trinity* [Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999], 180-182).

the divine persons.<sup>1084</sup> Singleness of action seems to imply singleness of agent, thus reducing to irrelevance the trinitarian nature of God.<sup>1085</sup> The problem becomes, how to ‘count persons without counting actions.’<sup>1086</sup>

Palamas resolves

this problem by saying that while the action of the divine persons is always numerically one, each person enacts or undertakes it in a different way. Each person has, as it were, a different role or place in the one divine action. . . . The difference consists in the unique location each person has in an irreversible sequence according to which all the actions of the Trinity are carried out. . . . [as follows:] . . . ‘the movement of the divine will is one, originating from (ἐκ) the Father as primary cause, going forth through (διὰ) the Son, and being manifested in (ἐν) the Holy Spirit.’ This suggests that every divine ‘movement’ is enacted by the Father as the one ‘from’ whom it occurs, the Son as the one ‘through’ whom it occurs, and the Spirit as the one ‘in’ whom it occurs; . . . . The outcome of every divine action bears the stamp of the particular sequence in which the persons enact it, and thereby each divine person in his distinction from the others.<sup>1087</sup>

In this sequence, both the distinction of persons and their roles are maintained, while also affirming that every divine act *ad extra* “‘is one action of the three.’” For example, one can say ‘the Father creates [or governs] . . . as the one from whom this action originates, while the Son creates [or governs] as the one through whom this same action takes place.’ The Spirit’s distinct contribution is to manifest ‘the origination of the action from the Father and its execution through the Son.’ In this way one can ‘count persons without counting actions.’<sup>1088</sup>

Marshall affirms that ‘Thomas agrees with Palamas on three crucial points’ in this model of divine action:

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<sup>1084</sup>Marshall, ‘Action and Person,’ 394.

<sup>1085</sup>Gunton makes a similar complaint (*Promise*, 3-4, 198; cf. Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, the Didsbury Lectures [Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Carlisle, UK: The Paternoster Press, 1992], 62).

<sup>1086</sup>Marshall, ‘Action and Person,’ 394, 395.

<sup>1087</sup>Marshall, ‘Action and Person,’ 395-396.

<sup>1088</sup>Marshall, ‘Action and Person,’ 396.

i) the actions of the triune God in the world display distinctions between the divine persons; ii) the actions display such distinctions because each person enacts or undertakes every action in a way unique to that person, and different from the ways in which the other persons engage in the action; iii) every action of the three persons is, nonetheless, numerically identical for the three.<sup>1089</sup>

Aquinas adds a fourth point which is only implicit in Palamas: 'the distinctions displayed in the divine actions *ad extra* have their visible root not only in the irreversible sequence in which the actions are undertaken . . . , but, beyond that, in the eternal and incommunicable uniqueness of each of the divine persons themselves.' In other words, the unique identity of each divine person in relation to the others accounts for 'the distinctions displayed in the divine actions *ad extra*.'<sup>1090</sup> For this reason, 'the divine actions display distinctions among the divine persons precisely by exhibiting the persons themselves in their innermost distinction from one another; the different ways in which the divine persons each undertake their action manifest, beyond the sequence of the action, the incommunicable uniqueness of each of the persons.'<sup>1091</sup> It is this combination of features which suggests the title given to this structure of trinitarian divine action: a sequential/uniqueness model.

According to Aquinas, therefore,

to 'appropriate . . . is nothing other than to draw that which is shared toward that which is proper (*commune trahere ad proprium*).' The 'propria' here are the characteristics or attributes which are absolutely unique to each divine person, in particular those which constitute the personal identity of each, and so are not shared with anyone else--in no way are they *commune*. To 'appropriate' is thus to ascribe or 'draw' (*trahere*) actions and attributes shared by the three persons differently to each, and primarily to one, on the basis of what is incommunicably unique to each person.<sup>1092</sup>

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<sup>1089</sup>Marshall, 'Action and Person,' 396, 397.

<sup>1090</sup>Marshall, 'Action and Person,' 397.

<sup>1091</sup>Marshall, 'Action and Person,' 401.

<sup>1092</sup>Marshall, 'Action and Person,' 399-400.

Upon this basis Aquinas appropriates or ascribes the act of adoption to the Father, although all three divine persons are equally and essentially involved in the act:

The Father is the *auctor* of *adoptare*, the original source without whose initiative the divine act of adopting creatures would not take place at all. The Son is the *exemplar* of *adoptare*, since we are adopted when we come to have, by participation, a relation to the Father which resembles his own eternal *filiatio*. The Spirit is the *imprimens* of *adoptare*, the agent who terminates the one divine act of adoption by uniting us to the *exemplar*, and in this way creating in us a participated likeness of the *exemplar*.<sup>1093</sup>

If adoption is understood as giving ‘to those who are not one’s natural offspring a share in the goods one gives to those who are,’ then ‘in the Father’s eternal act of *generare*, all that the Father is and has’ is given to the Son, while in the act of adoption humans are given a share in the Son’s reception of these goods, and thereby the Son plays the role of ‘*exemplar*’ or ‘model for our own sonship’ as ‘a “participated likeness” of the eternal Son’s natural relation to the Father.’<sup>1094</sup>

Applying this model to providence, it is not so much that Father, Son and Holy Spirit each do a particular part of providence (as if each could act without the other),<sup>1095</sup> but rather, providence is accomplished within the following general trinitarian structure: in any divine act *ad extra*, the Father is the ‘source’ [*auctor*] of the act, the Son is ‘its pattern (*exemplar*),’ and the Holy Spirit is the ‘agent’ (*imprimens*)<sup>1096</sup> who makes the work of providence effective in all levels of creation. This pattern would apply whether providence is understood either as a subsequent sustaining and governing of a universe which has first been created, or as an aspect of continuous creation.

Kathryn Tanner, adopting this model, applies it to creation and providence as follows:

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<sup>1093</sup>Marshall, ‘Action and Person,’ 398.

<sup>1094</sup>Marshall, ‘Action and Person,’ 398-399, 397-398.

<sup>1095</sup>Cf. O’Collins, *Tripersonal God*, 180.

<sup>1096</sup>Marshall, ‘Action and Person,’ 398.



the world . . . is created, sustained, and directed generally by God. Existing through the outreach of the Holy Spirit, coming forth from the Father as the source of all good in the form of or after the image of the Father which is the Son, and pervaded as the Son is by the Spirit resting on and through it, the world as it comes to be and takes shape from God reflects the dynamics of the trinitarian life.<sup>1097</sup>

Clarifying further, and in imagery similar to that used by Colin Gunton,<sup>1098</sup> Tanner states: 'By the breath of his mouth and in the image of his Word, the Father creates, preserves and saves the world; the Father brings into being, orders, and redeems, using, as Irenaeus would say, his two hands, Son and Spirit.'<sup>1099</sup>

Gunton argues that, 'according to the New Testament, creation is *through* and *to* Christ, and this means that it is, so to speak, structured by the very one who became incarnate and thus part of the created order of which we are speaking. It is good because God himself, through his Son, remains in intimate and loving relations with it.'<sup>1100</sup> For this reason it is appropriate to ascribe "'wisdom to the Son'"<sup>1101</sup> since creation, redemption and consummation, and the providence which links them, find their continuing pattern and telos toward perfection in him.

This model is similar to that developed by Pannenberg (Chapter Four, above) in which the Son provides the structure of otherness to the Father, a relation in which creation is enabled to participate by the operation of the Spirit.<sup>1102</sup> Pannenberg, however, modifies the Palamas/Aquinas model slightly by arguing that the Son has a *subjective* role as well as the Father.<sup>1103</sup> The Son's 'self-distinction from the

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<sup>1097</sup>Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity*, 41.

<sup>1098</sup>Cf. Gunton, 'End of Causality?', 77; idem, 'Relation and Relativity: The Trinity and the Created World,' in *Trinitarian Theology Today: Essays on Divine Being and Act*, ed. Christoph Schwöbel (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1995), 97; and idem, *Triune Creator*, 54, 60.

<sup>1099</sup>Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity*, 40.

<sup>1100</sup>Gunton, *Triune Creator*, 10. Cf. Gunton's statement, 'Jesus Christ is the one through whom all things take their shape and to whom the Spirit directs them' (*Christ and Creation*, 97).

<sup>1101</sup>Marshall, 'Action and Person,' 401.

<sup>1102</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 2: 22-23, 24, 29, 32, *Systematic* 3: 454.

<sup>1103</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 2: 29-30.



Father'<sup>1104</sup> is 'the principle of otherness' both in the Trinity and in creation, and it is the Son's *subjectivity* which instantiates 'the contingency and historicity of the reality that results from God's creative action.'<sup>1105</sup> The Son, therefore, 'is the origin as well as the consummator of creation.'<sup>1106</sup>

The strength of the uniqueness/sequential model of divine action lies in its ability to recognise *distinctions* between the triune persons and their roles in the economy, without at the same time thinking of them as *separate* persons as is the case when 'person' is used in reference to humans. It is clear, however, that such a model cannot account for the full range of complex definitions, relations and actions associated with the triune godhead. One key problem in this model is the way in which the Son and Spirit tend to remain passive instruments of the Father's will as they carry out his providential purposes. For that reason it may be helpful to turn to Moltmann's revolving trinitarian patterns in order to model the subjectivity of the Son and Spirit in providence.

### **Moltmann's Revolving Trinitarian Patterns**

Earlier, Moltmann's panperichoretic metaphysics was noted as the basis for his understanding that the triune persons subsist and exist in and out of each other. This relational metaphysics in turn, makes possible the openness of the inner-trinitarian history for creating and including within itself the history of all that is not God. On all levels of reality, therefore, it is possible to conceive of 'community without uniformity, and personality without individualism.'<sup>1107</sup> Although Moltmann's model of the Trinity and of creation leans toward an unacceptable emanationism, within the framework of his panperichoretic metaphysics he was able to develop a more nuanced understanding of the sequence of relations through which the Trinity embraces the world and its history. In fact, it is God's *creatio originalis*,

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<sup>1104</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 3: 454; cf. Millard Erickson, *God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995), 309-310.

<sup>1105</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 2: 28, 27.

<sup>1106</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 3: 454.

<sup>1107</sup>Moltmann, 'Perichoresis,' 113.

*creatio continua* and *creatio nova* which gives the world its history, and thus links its history intrinsically to that of the triune God's.

Moltmann's concept of *shifting trinitarian patterns* improves upon the previous sequential model by allowing for a re-ordering of the sequence of trinitarian patterns of relating among the divine persons--at least in their relation to the economy. Each pattern of the relations between the trinitarian persons gives priority to a different trinitarian person, depending upon which aspect of the creation-redemption-consummation sequence is in focus. Thus, the distinctions among the trinitarian works in the economy reflect distinctions within the immanent Trinity, but in such a way as respects the 'total equality of the divine persons': 'Each person is indwelling and room-giving *at the same time*.'<sup>1108</sup>

According to Moltmann, therefore, the specific form providence takes at any given moment and place in the history of God's relation to the world varies according to what God is working to accomplish at that moment. He illustrates as follows:

In the sending, delivering up and resurrection of Christ we find this sequence:

Father--Spirit--Son.

In the Lordship of Christ and the sending of the Spirit the sequence is:

Father--Son--Spirit.

But when we are considering the eschatological consummation and glorification, the sequence has to be:

Spirit--Son--Father.<sup>1109</sup>

The New Testament exhibits a variety and distinction with respect to the work of the divine Persons which reflects the perichoretic nature of their distinction-in-unity. Gary Badcock states this as a 'structural principle' in which

the Spirit is the point of terminus of the descending movement by which God comes to us, just as the Spirit is the point of the initiation of the journey back to the source. . . . Christologically, it means that the work of the Son is wholly geared to that of the Spirit, to spiritualization, as we might call it; pneumatologically, it implies that the work of the

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<sup>1108</sup>Moltmann, 'Perichoresis,' 114 (italics mine).

<sup>1109</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 94.

Spirit in and through the Son is directed to the goal of making others sons and daughters of God.<sup>1110</sup>

With regard to God's providential presence, Millard Erickson reminds us that the Holy Spirit 'is the particular person of the Trinity through whom the entire Triune Godhead currently works in us.' As such, 'the Holy Spirit is the point at which the Trinity becomes personal to the believer.'<sup>1111</sup>

It should be noted that these structures of trinitarian action cannot be pressed too far. For example, in his work on the Trinity, Gunton struggles with how to define the relation and roles of the Son and Spirit.<sup>1112</sup> Richard Bauckham can say 'our mode of relationship to the Spirit is not interpersonal at all.'<sup>1113</sup> Although he does not address all these issues, C. Norman Kraus helpfully traces the ambiguous nature of 'Spirit' in the New Testament. 'On the one hand, the Spirit is identified with the personal God. On the other, it is always God in a special activity or function.'<sup>1114</sup> For this reason, 'the word *spirit* may and likely does indicate both God's effective presence and the attitude or spirit which it effects in us.'<sup>1115</sup> This ambiguity of reference can lead to a 'pantheistic identity of God's Spirit and the human spirit.' Nevertheless, 'when we speak of the Holy Spirit of God, we are speaking of God's enlivening, purifying, encouraging presence in and through the lives of Christ's followers.'<sup>1116</sup> This corresponds to Gunton's emphasis that the

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<sup>1110</sup>Gary Badcock, Light of Truth, 271. Cf. Tanner, Jesus, Humanity, 20.

<sup>1111</sup>Millard Erickson, Christian Theology, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1998), 863, 862; cf. Grenz' comment that, 'since his out-pouring at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit facilitates the fulfillment of Jesus' assurance of his continual presence with his followers,' (Theology for the Community, 149).

<sup>1112</sup>Gunton, Promise, 199.

<sup>1113</sup>Bauckham, 'Moltmann's Trinity,' 161.

<sup>1114</sup>Kraus, God Our Savior, 133-134.

<sup>1115</sup>Kraus, God Our Savior, 134.

<sup>1116</sup>Kraus, God Our Savior, 134.

Spirit is in fact the third *person* of the Trinity, and as such is able to enter into 'free personal relation with us,'<sup>1117</sup> just as do the Father and Son.

A similar double reference for the term 'spirit' occurs in Pannenberg's trinitarian ontology: *spirit* is both the force field or field of life of the Trinity, and also takes the distinct form of the personal Holy Spirit. Whether or not one adopts Pannenberg's pneumatologically-based ontology of the Trinity, his model of the trinitarian God-world relation ensures that the divine Spirit does not become merged with human spirit. The Son is the power of distinction in the Trinity, and the Spirit is the principle of unity. Thus, the Spirit ensures that human spirit remains linked with the Father, but only through the Son.<sup>1118</sup> Gunton argues, differently than Pannenberg, that it is the Spirit who ensures not only the completion of (and so, unity between) 'the relations of Father and Son,' but also their distinction from one another, precisely 'as a Person' who 'leaves other persons free.'<sup>1119</sup> It is also the Spirit, therefore, who enables created others to remain both truly themselves, and yet enter into relationship with the Trinity.<sup>1120</sup> In either model, however, it is the Spirit's work to enable relationship between creation and the Trinity *through* the Son. As Moltmann, Pannenberg, Gunton and Thomas Finger insist, it is through the Son's incarnation that creation is completed. Each created entity ultimately has its form, identity, distinction and relation to the godhead through the Son, by means of the Spirit.

While one might agree with Wiles that creation as such is a single divine act, it is also an act that includes space and time, and which also includes a wide variety in the Trinity's creative and providential activities. Terence Fretheim notes that while the Old Testament presents a 'comprehensive divine working' in the history of the *whole* world, the modern 'focus on history and on decisive events in that history narrowed the range of God's activity.' He points out, however, that even the Old

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<sup>1117</sup>Gunton, 'God the Holy Spirit,' 109. Gunton recognises the difficulty in formulating a definition of either the being or function of the Spirit. This predicament derives in part from the 'self-effacing' quality of the Spirit's role in the economy (*ibid.*, 122).

<sup>1118</sup>Cf. Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity*, 39-4; cf. also Colin Gunton, 'God the Holy Spirit,' 118.

<sup>1119</sup>Gunton, 'God the Holy Spirit,' 128, 126, 126, n. 39.

<sup>1120</sup>Gunton, *Enlightenment*, 106; *idem*, *Promise*, 133, 131.

Testament *mono*-theistic God varies the ‘*intensification*’ of God’s action in different events and situations. Thus, ‘in developing a typology of divine presence, one might speak of variations in intensification in comparing God’s general (or creational) presence, God’s accompanying presence, God’s tabernacling presence, and God’s theophanic presence.’<sup>1121</sup> This illustrates the point that the MODEL of divine-human community focuses on the level of covenantal personal relationships between God and humans, and takes for granted the ontological creative/sustaining presence of God as the basis for this level of relating.

One aspect of the variety encompassed within the unitary creative act is the “moment” of present time and the present type of relation of the Trinity to the world in which time and space is made available through which human creatures not only come into being, but actually contribute to their own constitution as others-in-relation to the Father through the Son in the Spirit. The role of humans in this process occurs within the context of God’s varied providential presence. Richard Bauckham suggests a trinitarian structure of this presence which ensures the development of creaturely freedom and therefore identity-in-difference from God.

### **Bauckham’s “Spatial” Structure for Human Freedom**

This third structure of the Trinity-world relation is developed by Richard Bauckham in the context of his critique of Moltmann’s ‘Trinitarian Doctrine of Freedom.’<sup>1122</sup> Moltmann proposed this model as the structure of the Trinity’s relation to human freedom. In it he defines freedom as having three ‘stages’ or ‘transitions,’ or as having three strata, each one of which can be appropriated to one of the divine persons. The first level of freedom is appropriated to ‘the kingdom of the Father, [where] God is the Creator and the lord of those he has created,’ thus making ‘men and women’ secure and significant ‘servants’ of the Father. Second, ‘in the kingdom of the Son . . . servants of the Lord become the children of the Father.’ Through the Son they now have ‘free access’ to the Father. The third level

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<sup>1121</sup>Fretheim, ‘The God Who Acts: An Old Testament Perspective,’ *Theology Today* vol. 54, no. 1 (April, 1997): 8, 15.

<sup>1122</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 212.

of freedom is ‘the kingdom of the Spirit’ in which ‘the servants of the Lord and the children of the Father become God’s friends.’<sup>1123</sup>

Bauckham thinks it is questionable whether these appropriations can be sustained.<sup>1124</sup> For example, in the New Testament, we are ‘servants of *Christ* the Lord’ as well as of the Father as Lord. Further, it is the Spirit who enables relationships both to the Father as Father and to the Son as Friend, and thus the category of ‘friend’ is not simply associated with the Spirit. Bauckham points out that the type of freedom associated with the Spirit is rather that of ‘being “led by the Spirit.”’<sup>1125</sup>

He suggests, instead, the use of another set of metaphors in which we

know God in three dimensions: as God above us (the Father), alongside us (Jesus, the Son), and within us (the Spirit). The fact that this is the structure of God’s *love* for us excludes the domination that eliminates freedom. But also the fact that God’s love for us has *this* structure excludes the merely paternalistic care that inhibits freedom. The structure gives Christian freedom three poles between which it takes shape: authority with belonging, solidarity, spontaneity. The correlation of these three poles with the three trinitarian persons is not to be pressed too far, but they do indicate a trinitarian shape to the Christian experience of freedom.<sup>1126</sup>

Bauckham argues further that, if carefully unpacked, these ‘three poles’ could show that God’s lordship, far from being incompatible with human freedom, actually ‘enables human freedom.’<sup>1127</sup> Thus, in this spatial model God is *with* us as three dimensions of our experience of freedom.

The question arises, however, as to whether this set of metaphors and appropriations does not also lend itself to the danger of a functional modalism, that

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<sup>1123</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 219-220.

<sup>1124</sup>Bauckham, ‘Moltmann’s *Trinity*,’ 163.

<sup>1125</sup>Bauckham, ‘Moltmann’s *Trinity*,’ 163. Cf. Michael E. Lodahl’s cogent discussion of how the divine persons are not all persons in the same way, and the significance of this for Trinity-world relationships (‘*Una Natura Divina, Tres Nescio Quid: What Sorts of Personae are Divine Personae?*,’ *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 218-230).

<sup>1126</sup>Bauckham, ‘Moltmann’s *Trinity*,’ 164.

<sup>1127</sup>Bauckham, ‘Moltmann’s *Trinity*,’ 164.



is, these spatial images of the Trinity's relation to humans may be nothing more than reflections of the different ways in which Christians *experience* God. This would reduce the triune character of divine action to a kind of psychological Trinity. If so, then thinking of God as triune would serve as a useful fiction, but have no basis in trinitarian ontology. Moreover, not only does the New Testament picture the *Son* as 'alongside' us, but also the *Holy Spirit* (as Paraclete); and not only is the Spirit 'within' us, so also is Christ.<sup>1128</sup>

Perhaps Bauckham's model could be clarified or strengthened if integrated with Marshall's interpretation of Palamas and Aquinas, and with the trinitarian model of Moltmann. Moltmann, like Pannenberg, shifts from spatial imagery to temporal imagery--God is *ahead* of creation. While the perichoretic unity of the godhead entails that this imagery "locates" *all three* triune persons in the transcendent future, nevertheless, it is possible to conceive of the triune Persons playing distinct roles in their one relation to the whole of the creation story. If the sequence of divine action suggested by Palamas and Aquinas, and as supplemented by Moltmann, is further applied to Bauckham's model, the unity of trinitarian action is maintained, even while allowing the appropriation of creation and providence to the Father who is *ahead* of creation (rather than 'above'), and to whom we relate in the present by our participation in the life of the Trinity as mediated *through* the Son, *in* the Holy Spirit. Just as the Son has *yet* to hand over the kingdom to the Father, so also, as we participate in the Son's filial relation to the Father, are we *yet* to enter the completed kingdom of glory when, as Moltmann says, 'God will be all in all.' The idea of the Father *ahead* of creation, used metaphorically and not literally, minimises the negative overtone of the dominance implicit in Bauckham's metaphor of 'above.' Instead, this temporal transcendence allows Moltmann's concept of heaven, as the domain of possibilities,<sup>1129</sup> to act as a "storehouse" of truly new options which can transform present reality toward the Sabbath of the new creation.

This model of transcendence of the future requires, however, a more nuanced model of the Trinity's relation to time in order to enable creation to move ahead into

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<sup>1128</sup>Cf. Colossians 1:27; and Ro. 8:10 (RSV).

<sup>1129</sup>Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 162-164.

its future as empowered and directed by the action of the triune Persons. On the one hand, Moltmann has worked out a concept of the interlaced times of history<sup>1130</sup> and of the perichoresis of time and eternity,<sup>1131</sup> but in a way which seems to imply *becoming* in God. Nevertheless, the perichoretic nature of created times, and of time and eternity, models a way in which God's relation to the world is not limited to temporal sequence. 'Past and future can then no longer be reduced to the same linear temporal concept, for their relation to one another is now one of qualitative difference. It is the difference between "old" and "new."'<sup>1132</sup>

On the other hand, Pannenberg's Plotinian and Boethian concept of God's relation to time in terms of simultaneity<sup>1133</sup> seems to more adequately ensure the distinction between God and creation even while making it possible to conceive that God's relation to creation transcends the limits of past, present and future. This model of the relation between eternity and time ensures that time is real, even for God, and yet God's "frame-of-reference" is such that all moments of time are present at once to him. Thus, 'on the level of its own creaturely reality, that which is present to God belongs to different times. But before God it is present. In this regard God's eternity needs no recollection or expectation, for it is itself simultaneous with all events in the strict sense.' In this model 'eternity is the undivided presence of life in its totality.'<sup>1134</sup>

Laurence Wood advocates a similar understanding of eternity and time, drawing upon the theory of relativity to illustrate how it is conceptually possible--although counter-intuitive--to conceive of time as 'a real fragment of eternity': 'To put it metaphorically, God can travel faster than the speed of light so that the past, present, and future are always present to him.'<sup>1135</sup> In this model,

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<sup>1130</sup>Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 133-134; cf. also 124-139.

<sup>1131</sup>Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (SCM Press Ltd., 1996), 295.

<sup>1132</sup>Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 134.

<sup>1133</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic 2*: 90-102; cf. idem, *Systematic 1*: 403-406.

<sup>1134</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic 2*: 91, 92.

<sup>1135</sup>Wood, 'Does God Know the Future?', 10, 30. Cf. William Stoeger's argument that 'temporal reality as a dynamic manifold of interrelated finite beings actually *issues* from the temporal

therefore, it is possible to appropriate the future (as the field of possibility) to the Father, but as mediated to each present through the Son and in the Spirit. Strictly speaking, in their perichoretic unity Father, Son and Holy Spirit embrace all of time, and yet the dynamic relationality of the inner-trinitarian life allows the going out of the Son into the creation (by the Spirit), and the return of the creation in the Son (by the Spirit) to the Father.<sup>1136</sup>

With these revisions in place, one might suggest the following appropriations: to the Father, as '*auctor*,' envisionment of the whole and "*aheadness*"; to the Son, as '*exemplar*,' structure and *withness*; and to the Spirit, as '*imprimens*,' empowerment and "*in-ness*". As with Bauckham's metaphors, these appropriations cannot be pressed too far, especially in light of the perichoretic unity of trinitarian Persons and activities. Nevertheless, they do attempt to begin modelling a trinitarian structure of relating to the world which reflects real *distinctions* between the Persons even while refusing to accept *separation* of the Persons. This model also raises the question of the need for a more nuanced model of the Trinity's relation to time--where time is understood not only in terms of quantity and sequence (*chronos*), but also in terms of differing qualities (*kairos*).

### Perichoresis of the Trinitarian Times

A fourth model of trinitarian divine action is suggested by Michael Welker's correlation of created times with the trinitarian persons' activities in the economy. He adopts a concept similar to Moltmann's perichoretic concept of the times of creation, calling 'into question not only the abstract opposition of God and eternity over against time and temporality,' but also 'the *totalization and unification* of time.'<sup>1137</sup> His view of eternity seems to be similar to that of Pannenberg and Boethius, that is, it is not 'a timeless abstraction,' but 'instant unlimited duration,' 'a

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eternity of God's inner relationships as a communion of three persons' ('God and Time,' 373; cf. *ibid.*, 375, 376).

<sup>1136</sup>Cf. Gunton, 'God the Holy Spirit,' 127; Stoeger, 'God and Time,' 375; and Thomas Finger, *Christian Theology: An Eschatological Approach*, vol. 2 (Kitchener, Ont.; Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989), 446-448.

<sup>1137</sup>Michael Welker, 'God's Eternity,' 321.

“quality of life, not mere quantity, something quite different from everlastingness, something infinitely richer and fuller than timelessness or perpetual duration.”<sup>1138</sup>

Welker assumes a bottom-up approach to understanding the triune work in the economy, taking his orientation from the biblical images and metaphors of God’s relation to, and activity in, eternity and time. In this way he refers to the ‘modes’ of the trinitarian being (‘or the so-called “persons” of the Trinity’)<sup>1139</sup> and their activities as differentiated, but perichoretically related, kinds of time. On the one hand, Welker’s language here implies a kind of functional modalism. On the other hand, this model, like Moltmann’s and Pannenberg’s, seems to be a form of panentheism: the distinct kinds of time, ascribed severally to the triune “persons,” are so inextricably linked to each of the triune “persons” that creation exists *within* the differentiated relationships of the immanent Trinity.<sup>1140</sup> Thomas Finger argues convincingly, however, that there are resources within ‘historic Christian trinitarianism’ as derived from ‘biblical history’ which can address the relational and ecological concerns which make the panentheistic option attractive,<sup>1141</sup> thereby avoiding the emanationism which often accompanies panentheistic models.

Leaving aside the question of functional modalism and panentheism, Welker’s first type of time is associated with the Father as creator. This is cosmological time, the ‘divine and creaturely attunement of cosmological, biological, and cultural realms of phenomena and temporal rhythms.’<sup>1142</sup> Although cosmological time is rooted in the orders of creation, this is not a static preservation of an “eternal recourse of the same,” partly because it includes the cooperative efforts of creatures in correlating the ‘cosmological, biological, and cultural’ dimensions of time, and partly because it participates in the ‘liveliness’ of the

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<sup>1138</sup>Laurence Wood, ‘Does God Know the Future?’, 7, 6.

<sup>1139</sup>Michael Welker, ‘God’s Eternity,’ 324.

<sup>1140</sup>Chapter Four noted some of these problems with Moltmann’s pan-perichoretic metaphysics.

<sup>1141</sup>Finger, ‘Trinity, Ecology and Panentheism,’ 90, 91; cf. also, *ibid.*, 90-98.

<sup>1142</sup>Michael Welker, ‘God’s Eternity,’ 322-323.

trinitarian being. This type of time is constituted 'of a *connection of times that can be universally measured*' and is 'reversible.'<sup>1143</sup>

The second dimension of time corresponds to the second "person" of the Trinity, the Son or Logos, and includes 'the *complex of historical times*.' The character of this time, in itself, is 'irreversible and past-present-future,' and for that reason 'these temporal forms' (such as the life 'and activity of Jesus of Nazareth') can decisively 'shape and mark the course of a multitude of other events in particular ways.'<sup>1144</sup>

The reversibility of the Father's cosmological time or activity is seen most clearly in its perichoretic relation to the third type of time, the salvific and renewing work of the Spirit. 'Through the Spirit, God's creative powers are mediated and become known as saving and *renewing* powers that, without interruption, act upon and through creatures.'<sup>1145</sup> One assumes Welker to mean here that the salvation energies of the Trinity do not violate the regularities of creation as it is *first* given, but repeatedly *pick up again* that same creation, saving it through renewing it.

Just as, and just because, the divine "persons" are perichoretically constituted and so form a dynamic unity, so the creative-cosmological, historical, and salvific times/activities of the divine persons are perichoretically related. In this way, even though the trinitarian work *ad extra* is a differentiated work requiring the activity of each "person" or mode of being of the Trinity' in order to constitute the 'fullness, *pleroma*, *doxa*, and eternal life' of the Trinity, precisely for this reason 'the external work of the Trinity is indivisible.'<sup>1146</sup> This also means that God's creative and preserving time/activity is always available in the historical dimensions of time through the renewing, re-creative work of the Spirit. This makes possible

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<sup>1143</sup>Michael Welker, 'God's Eternity,' 325.

<sup>1144</sup>Michael Welker, 'God's Eternity,' 325.

<sup>1145</sup>Michael Welker, 'God's Eternity,' 326 (italics mine).

<sup>1146</sup>Michael Welker, 'God's Eternity,' 324, 325.

redemption and consummation from times that have been distorted and de-harmonised.<sup>1147</sup> As Thomas Finger observes,

the gospels . . . portray the apocalyptic sufferings of the entire creation being borne in this event [that is, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ]. The early resurrection accounts proclaim that this Son was raised by the Father through the Spirit, announcing this event as the beginning of a whole new creation. The resurrection leads directly to the outpouring of the Spirit, *who gathers a new community* and sends it into mission to the ends of the earth, *anticipating fuller transformations* of nature.<sup>1148</sup>

As noted above, however, Welker's model of the relation of the different, but perichoretically related, times of the Trinity's activity in the economy seems to imply a functional modalism--he refers, for example, to the 'modes' or 'the so-called "persons" of the Trinity.' For this reason, his model of the Trinity could benefit from the irreducible both/and structure of Moltmann's Trinity: 'personality and relationships are *genetically connected*,' and as such 'the two arise simultaneously and together.'<sup>1149</sup> This type of dynamic structure becomes the basis, for example, of Gunton's emphasis on a relational ontology of relation-in-otherness.<sup>1150</sup>

Moreover, if adopted without qualifications, Welker's concept of 'reversibility' fails to respect the real effects of errors in historical time, as seen in his implied universalism.<sup>1151</sup> It tends to simply *replace*, instead of transform, not only spoiled dimensions of creation, but even good achievements in history, with a wholly new creation *ex nihilo*. Therefore, the present thesis proposes emphasising the transformational and trans-gathering-up aspect of creative time. It is transformational because the Spirit makes available the truly new of re-creative time, but only as it takes up and modifies the non-reversible effects of historical time. This

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<sup>1147</sup>Cf. Gunton for a similar view of the Spirit's function in making 'present the things that are promised for the end of time, moral goodness among them' (*Enlightenment*, 103; cf. 104-105, 143, 151; and *Promise*, 50-51, 174).

<sup>1148</sup>Thomas Finger, 'Trinity, Ecology and Panentheism,' 91 (italics mine).

<sup>1149</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 173.

<sup>1150</sup>Cf. Gunton, *Promise*, 195, 202, 204, 205, 12-13.

<sup>1151</sup>Michael Welker, 'God's Eternity,' 327.



gives the Trinity's relation to the world trans-historical, trans-temporal and trans-formational dimensions which correspond to God's ability to bring good out of evil.

This seems to be Pannenberg's emphasis in the concept of providence as a divine 'overruling.' He insists that, unlike in Hegel's concept of *Aufhebung* in which the individual is sacrificed to the good of the 'general,' 'Christian eschatology preserves the indissoluble relation between our individual and our common destiny.'<sup>1152</sup> One might suggest, therefore, a version of *Aufhebung* in which old paradigms are not simply discarded, but gathered up as old forms or ways of being, and incorporated, along with new insights, into a new paradigm or synthesis. In that very process old information, the old way-of-being, takes on a new gestalt. The new gestalt is not an ending, but a momentary feature of a deeper, more profound process. A picture emerges of gestalts-in-motion--emerging, "dying," being subsumed into more complete gestalts. As long as these gestalts-in-motion are understood as both sublimating the old--discarding what is evil, retaining what is good--and giving it a new way-of-being, then Welker's idea of the irreversible time of the Son can be incorporated into the re-creative time of the Spirit and both together serve the Father's purpose of establishing creatures who can participate in an eternally "historical" mode-of-being in which the truly new is possible,<sup>1153</sup> but without losing either the harmony of the right relationships in which they subsist or the underlying ontology which defines the essential properties of their identity. The concept of *Aufhebung* would only be 'too Hegelian' if applied to becoming *in God*--a weakness in Moltmann's trinitarian ontology. The concept of *Aufhebung* is only dismissive of past achievements, oppressive of present freedom, and deterministic with reference to the future if it is seen as a unilateral work of the Spirit. Instead, the distinction and identity given to humans through the Son and Spirit (Pannenberg) requires their continued participation in their own future. Gunton argues for a similar concept, that is, creation as both a project and 'a process by which that which was in the beginning is not so much restored to a former integrity as returned perfected to the Father

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<sup>1152</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 3: 636.

<sup>1153</sup>Cf. Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 213-214; and idem, *Coming of God*, xi.

through the Son and by the Spirit--an eschatological rather than protological return, if we may so speak.<sup>1154</sup>

Gunton's understanding of creation as project, like Welker's trinitarian times, entails an overlap in the doctrines of creation, providence, redemption and consummation.<sup>1155</sup> First, creation establishes the basic forms of created being. Second, providence guarantees both their continuance in existence (preservation) and God's co-operation (*concursus*) with their created powers of acting (including their relative freedom). Third, 'the continuing creative divine agency toward the world'<sup>1156</sup> guarantees that creation will continue to develop in its 'richness and variety'<sup>1157</sup> toward 'a completion that is destined, but not fully determined, in advance.'<sup>1158</sup> Finally, redemption and sanctification guarantee that creation's present tendency toward *destructive* ways of "development" can be reversed so that creation can be returned to its original *constructive movement* toward its designed end--for humans, this means relating to the Father after the pattern of the Son's relating. The aspect of continuing creation (as project) means that the provenance of providence includes a divine governance of a *dynamic process of development* (versus the maintenance of static orders of relating).<sup>1159</sup> The means God uses both to restore this dynamic process of development to its original healthful way-of-being, and for continuing it in its constructive mode, is the redemptive and perfecting work of the

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<sup>1154</sup>Gunton, 'God the Holy Spirit,' 127; cf. also idem, 'End of Causality?,' 81; idem, *Triune Creator*, 10, 86, 170-71, 177-8, 188-9, 223; idem, *Christ in Creation*, 46, 50; and idem, *Promise*, 199, xxx.

<sup>1155</sup>Gunton, *Triune Creator*, 223, 10, 192; Gunton, 'Relation and Relativity,' 97; Cf. Thomas Finger's linking of the concept of the inner-trinitarian '*perichoresis*, the mutual self-giving and receiving among Father, Son and Spirit . . . of love, energy, and adoration,' to the perichoretic unity of the divine acts of creation, redemption and eschatological transformation ('Trinity, Ecology and Panentheism,' 93).

<sup>1156</sup>Gunton, 'End of Causality?,' 81.

<sup>1157</sup>Gunton, *Promise*, 203.

<sup>1158</sup>Gunton, *Triune Creator*, 184; cf. *ibid.*, 192.

<sup>1159</sup>Gunton stresses the importance of emphasising providence as action ('as *providing for*') rather than 'in terms of knowledge' ('as *seeing in advance*'), since the latter emphasis 'is difficult to disentangle from suggestions of determinism' (*Triune Creator*, 191). It is debatable whether such a restriction of emphasis achieves this goal, but at least it does allow for an important emphasis on the personal involvement of the Trinity in guiding, empowering and liberating humans (cf. *ibid.*, 183-184, 191).

Son and Spirit. In this way a close link is maintained between the doctrines of creation, providence, redemption and eschatology.

Gunton's trinitarian doctrine of providence, therefore, helps to clarify Welker's model of trinitarian divine action. Gunton's model 'suggests that we conceive of providence chiefly in terms of two models: the Son as the giver of structure, and the Holy Spirit as the one who gives the world space to become within, but not apart from, that structuring.'<sup>1160</sup> This is reflected in his definition of providence (noted above) as 'mediated by the two hands of God.'<sup>1161</sup>

There is, however, at least a latent weakness in Gunton's model which is similar to the problem with the model of Palamas and Aquinas: it involves a "delegation" of providential tasks from the Father to the Son and Spirit. The language used to express this "delegation" tends to make the Son and Spirit passive in the outworking of providence: the *unity* of the divine acts *ad extra* is achieved by deriving their source in the Father's will, and from the execution of that will by the Father's 'two hands.' Nevertheless, in emphasising the *distinctions* within the divine acts *ad extra*, each of the divine Persons contribute something distinct and essential to the one act: the Father *wills*, and *sends*; the Son *provides* structure and salvation; the Spirit *enables* and *perfects*.<sup>1162</sup>

These models of trinitarian action *ad extra* (sequential/uniqueness model, and Tanner's adaptation of it; Moltmann; Pannenberg; and Gunton) help to show how Welker's 'three wreaths of metaphors' for time, as a model of trinitarian divine action, can be adapted to a trinitarian model of providence. This is seen especially in focusing on the *kind* of activity associated with each of the divine persons. What each of the trinitarian persons provide is a necessary element in the single matrix of divine activity/time *ad extra*, which in turn constitutes the context for human life and redemption as it moves toward the final shape of the divine-human community. As

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<sup>1160</sup>Gunton, *Triune Creator*, 192.

<sup>1161</sup>Gunton, *Triune Creator*, 176.

<sup>1162</sup>Gunton, *Triune Creator*, 10.

such, this model both respects the unidirectional arrow of time<sup>1163</sup> (the irreversible dimension of the historical time of the Son; the enduring identity of persons), and yet has resources to transcend this temporal progression in the cosmological time of the creative Father as mediated through the salvific and transformational time of the Spirit. It is these latter two types of activity/time which introduce the possibility of an intersection between eternity and the space-time matrix, and therefore they become the basis of providentially supported hope in, and for, what occurs in history.

Because this thesis has treated providence primarily as it relates to humans, one further model of divine action can add another perspective on the trinitarian structure of God's providential action in the world, especially as it relates to God's interpersonal relations with humans.

### Communicative Theism

This thesis has suggested that the locus of a doctrine of providence is best understood in terms of God's relation to the human world in terms of community, and not as an aspect of one of God's attributes--such as foreknowledge or 'omnipotent will.'<sup>1164</sup> Nevertheless, this relation and work *ad extra* does *reflect* God's character. As such, a doctrine of providence constitutes the comprehensive statement of the link between God and the world. If, as Kevin Vanhoozer argues, love is taken as the most appropriate root metaphor for describing God's essential character and God's relation to the world,<sup>1165</sup> and further, if a trinitarian doctrine of providence were to be taken as the comprehensive expression of, and matrix for, love's work *ad extra*, then a doctrine of providence would have a ubiquitous presence in all other theological doctrines<sup>1166</sup> just because 'the love of God . . . occup[ies] no one place in a theological system, but every place.'<sup>1167</sup>

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<sup>1163</sup>Cf. Stephen Hawking, A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1988, 1990), 143-153.

<sup>1164</sup>Cf. Gunton's critique of these models (Triune Creator, 150, 150-153).

<sup>1165</sup>Kevin Vanhoozer, 'Effectual Call or Causal Effect?', chap. in First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics (Leicester, UK: Apollos; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 94-95.

<sup>1166</sup>William Burt Pope, A Compendium of Christian Theology, vol. 1: 456.

<sup>1167</sup>Vanhoozer, 'Effectual Call,' 95.

In Vanhoozer's 'communicative theism,' this love is the love of the Trinity expressed toward the world as the three modes of the divine speech act. First, 'the Father's activity is locution. God the Father is the utterer, the begetter, the sustainer of words.' Second, 'the Logos corresponds to the speaker's act or illocution, to what one *does* in saying. The illocution has content (reference and predication) and a particular intent (a force) that shows how the proposition is to be taken. It is illocutionary force that makes a speech act *count* as, say, a promise.' Third, the activity of the Spirit corresponds to the perlocutionary aspect of a speech act, that is, 'to the effect an illocutionary act has on the actions or beliefs of the hearer.' Thus, 'the Spirit [first] illumines the reader and so enables the reader to grasp the illocutionary point, to recognize what the Scriptures may be doing. Second, the Spirit convicts the reader that the illocutionary point of the biblical text deserves the appropriate response,' such as 'belief, obedience, praise or some other.'<sup>1168</sup> The work of the Spirit amounts to an enabling of the hearer's intellect and will to respond in ways appropriate to the particular communication (Word--structure). This respects the person's integrity and freedom as a personal other, allowing them to choose how to respond to the communication.

In this model of trinitarian action *ad extra*, 'God not only communicates information and does things but also communicates himself. . . . The Father is the cause of his communicative and self-communicative action, the Son is the Maker or Form, and the Spirit is the Perfector/finisher of the action.'<sup>1169</sup> Each divine Person plays a unique, but essential, constitutive role in the one communicative act. God as Trinity is self-communicated in the complete and single communicative act of locution-illocution-perlocution. Thus the perichoretic unity of the Persons is reflected in the perichoretic unity of their communicative actions. Analytic in that unity are the irreducible distinctions between Persons and actions.

If there is an element of inner-trinitarian subordinationism in this model, it could be interpreted as the freely chosen "subordinationism" Pannenberg envisions

<sup>1168</sup>Kevin Vanhoozer, 'God's Mighty Speech Acts,' chap. in First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics (Leicester, UK: Apollos; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 154-155.

<sup>1169</sup>Kevin Vanhoozer, email communication with author, Tuesday, 24 December 2002.

for the Son who freely obeys the Father. The struggle with this trinitarian model of divine action, as with all such models, is to respect the limits of the analogy.<sup>1170</sup>

This communicative theist model of divine action is helpful on several levels. First, as ‘a subset of the God-world relation,’ it avoids impersonal causal language. While not denying God’s causal agency in the non-human and human worlds,<sup>1171</sup> Vanhoozer has sought to move beyond the impasse of having to choose between models based upon causality of will<sup>1172</sup> versus the models of relational mutuality in many panentheistic theologies, and speaks instead of ‘communicative theism’ as a type of agency more appropriate to humans.<sup>1173</sup>

Second, the communicative theist model accommodates the several kinds of divine action involved in interpersonal communication as experienced in covenantal community with God. Here, the triune God acts by a variety of speech acts in which each of the divine Persons makes a unique contribution. Finally, it privileges the trinitarian, dynamic, free, and personal nature of God’s love. This latter point enables one to affirm ‘that the principal mode in which God is “with” his people is through speech acts,’ and this is especially important since ‘discern[ing] God’s presence’ requires ‘communication on God’s part.’<sup>1174</sup>

While no one of the above models of trinitarian divine action, nor even all of them together, fully address all the issues in the complex providential workings of the Trinity, they do provide ways to begin thinking of providence in a trinitarian context. It might be helpful at this point to illustrate how a master MODEL of community, which incorporates a doctrine of providence as worked out in trinitarian structures of divine action, can provide an illuminating milieu in which to address a few of the issues raised in earlier chapters.

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<sup>1170</sup>Vanhoozer points out that this model is still under construction. He also notes that he ‘see[s] it as applicable to the economic Trinity more than to the immanent Trinity’ (email communication with author, Tuesday, 31 December 2002).

<sup>1171</sup>Kevin Vanhoozer, ‘The Case Remains Unproven,’ *Dialog* [Fall 1999]: 284; idem, *First Theology*, 90, n. 65.

<sup>1172</sup>Cf. Gunton, ‘End of Causality?’, 65, 66; Gunton, *Triune Creator*, 150-153.

<sup>1173</sup>Kevin Vanhoozer, ‘The Love of God,’ chap. in *First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics* (Leicester, UK: Apollos; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 90-91.

<sup>1174</sup>Vanhoozer, ‘God’s Mighty Speech Acts, 149.



## **ILLUSTRATING THE BENEFITS OF THE MODEL**

There are several benefits to incorporating a doctrine of providence into a community MODEL of the God-world relation. First, viewed generally, it allows discussion of providence, especially of its purpose and method, to begin with christology and hence soteriology, which in turn ensures that the discussion will remain in touch with individual experiences of grace, that is, in touch with the concrete experiences of Christians. For this reason it takes into account the church's actual experience of God as triune.<sup>1175</sup> Beginning with christology ensures that discussion of providence remains in touch with the paradigmatic understanding of God's relation to the world as embodied in the Christ event. Second, it corresponds well with a holistic and relational metaphysics. Finally, a focus on communitarian versus causal language directs attention to the personal aspect of divine providence.

In reference to more particular issues, providence as developed within a community MODEL enables a new perspective on some of the aspects of providence noted in foregoing chapters. The issues chosen for treatment here are: the hiddenness of God and its impact on meaning; linking a model of providence to personal experiences of grace; exploring the connections between providence, eschatology, Sabbath and community; and relating trinitarian providence to human freedom.

### **Relating Hiddenness and Meaning**

An important symptom (noted in Chapter One) of the problems with a doctrine of providence was the sense of the absence of God. The Death of God Movement represented a crisis of intellectual and experiential adequacy for traditional views of God and providence. This failure of credibility led to talk of "the death of the God of providence."<sup>1176</sup> This in turn raised the question of how to

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<sup>1175</sup>Cf. Niels Gregersen's three 'pragmatic contexts in which the meaning of providence is actualized': '1) the reference to God's action (and nature) in the context of first-hand religious experience, relative to concrete life situations; 2) the reference to God's action (and nature) in the context of liturgy and hymns, that is, in a transpersonal symbolic language that refers to typical situations; and 3) the reference to the action (and nature) of God in the context of reflected and doctrinal belief systems' ('Providence in an Indeterministic World,' 17).

<sup>1176</sup>Maurice Wiles, 'Providence,' *Epworth Review* 21 no. 1 (January 1994): 82.

continue making *theological* meaning of one's experience of life. Part of the new situation for a doctrine of providence, therefore, is the loss of the concept of a universe of fixed meaning which humans are simply to discover, and with which they are to comply, and the realisation that human intellect is itself part of an emergent, self-creative milieu.<sup>1177</sup>

One way of addressing this problem is to set aside discussion of philosophical problems with the God of Classical Theism, and suggest instead that *any* model of the God-world relation will involve a necessary "*hiddenness*" of God's sustaining and governing presence. In response to the question of meaning as it relates to the seeming absence of God, the suggestion offered here is that while the truly new may now seem more possible (Gilkey; Moltmann) than traditional doctrines of providence allowed, what is needed is not a claim that God absents himself from *interaction* with creation (Wiles), nor even a new realisation of God's absence (or "death"), but instead a new *understanding* of the kind of world God's creative and providential activity underwrites. Part of this new understanding takes into account the seeming randomness and contingency, not only of quantum events, but also of human actions. The ambiguity regarding whether an event, either at the micro<sup>1178</sup> or macro level,<sup>1179</sup> fits into an overarching meaning is reflected not only in science-theology discussions,<sup>1180</sup> but also in theological and philosophical models of human free will.<sup>1181</sup> All three disciplines find it necessary to take into account the pervasive

<sup>1177</sup>Cf. Robert O. Johann, S.J., 'Creativity and Unbelief,' in The Presence and Absence of God, The Cardinal Bea Lectures, ed. Christopher F. Mooney, S.J. (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 1968, 1969), 6-7.

<sup>1178</sup>Cf. William G. Pollard, Chance and Providence (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958); cf. also, Christopher F. Mooney, S.J., Theology and Scientific Knowledge: Changing Models of God's Presence in the World, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 106.

<sup>1179</sup>Cf. Arthur Peacocke, Theology for a Scientific Age: Being and Becoming--Natural, Divine and Human, enlarged edition (London, UK: SCM Press Ltd., 1990).

<sup>1180</sup>Cf. John Polkinghorne's model of 'free' or 'flexible process' (Science and Providence: God's Interaction With the World [London, UK: SPCK, 1989], 66-67, 31, 88-89).

<sup>1181</sup>Cf. the models of Helm and Sanders in Chapter Three above. Cf. also Pannenberg, 'Meaning, Religion, and the Question of God,' chap. in Metaphysics and the Idea of God, trans. Philip Clayton (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Edinburgh, UK: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1990).

sense of contingency, relativity, and openness in the universe,<sup>1182</sup> on both the inanimate and human levels.<sup>1183</sup>

If the concept of providence as a context of meaning is to survive, therefore, it will need to be linked with a theological model which is able to account for both contingency and novelty in human experience. What appears as a new *problem* for providence--God's absence--can be addressed in terms of a new *perspective* on an old issue--God's *hidden* covenantal grace. The development of a scientific worldview, in conjunction with an increased awareness of evil and a more holistic understanding of the interconnectedness of all of creation requires an adjustment in the terminology, categories and models associated with providence, but not necessarily an abandonment of belief in God's active care for the world.

The argument put forward here sees the community MODEL of the God-world relation as a context which requires and embodies a sense of God's hiddenness in order to establish created *others*, whose otherness in turn is required if they are to become constituents in a divine-human community. The concept of God's hiddenness, therefore, as one sub-doctrine within a larger model, helps to account for the *apparent* ambiguity, randomness, contingency (and even absence) of God's providential care.

Each of the models surveyed in previous chapters, explicitly or implicitly, has answered the critique of the Death of God Movement regarding the felt absence of the intervening God of Classical Christian Theism, by showing that God *must* appear hidden to one degree or another for either epistemological or ontological reasons. Even though this hiddenness is sometimes misinterpreted as "absence," it need not be understood as an intrinsic *weakness* applicable only to the immutable God of classical theism, but can just as well be understood as an intrinsic *feature* of any transcendent God's providential relation to the world, a relation in which some kind

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<sup>1182</sup>Cf. Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age*, 64-65, 119, 152-157, 307-309.

<sup>1183</sup>The space and time afforded to creation by God is seen by many to be made possible by a sovereign divine self-limitation. Cf. Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 86-90; Mooney, *Theology and Scientific Knowledge*, 106-108; and Polkinghorne, *Science and Christian Belief*, 81. Ron Highfield, however, argues that appeals to such *self*-limitation, whether by determinists or open theists, amounts to an actual limitation of God's deity ('Divine Self-Limitation in the Theology of Jürgen Moltmann: A Critical Appraisal,' *Christian Scholar's Review* 32, no. 1 [Fall 2002]: 66-68).

of ontological distinction (with God's attendant hiddenness) is required in order for humans to establish an identity distinct from, yet dependent upon, God. It becomes necessary to distinguish between God's creative/preservational "presence" and God's personal/covenantal presence. As such, God's hiddenness on both an ontological level, and to some degree on a covenantal level, becomes a necessary corollary of God's presence, for only when there is creaturely distinction and identity can there be an *other* to which the Trinity can be personally present.<sup>1184</sup>

In Helm's model of providence, for example, God's hidden will was thought to be necessary in order to ensure God's absolute sovereignty. Helm's model was unable to grant humans a level of freedom which could actually change God's mind. In Sanders' and Pannenberg's models some degree of hiddenness of God's will, presence and action was thought to be necessary in order to give humans space and time to develop and exercise free loving commitment to God.<sup>1185</sup> Wiles' model overemphasised the independence aspect of the human creature by eliminating any interaction with the creator on a personal level, making God's transcendent hiddenness a necessary part of the God-world relation. Gilkey's model of providence saw God's hiddenness as linked to the ontology of God himself, and resulted in the loss of God's ultimate control of creation's future. Moltmann tried to honour the balance of otherness-in-relation by affirming a divine self-limitation and therefore hiddenness, but ultimately his model was threatened with a loss of divine self-sufficiency, and also with the determinism he had rejected in the classical model of providence. Pannenberg and Sanders perhaps came closest to maintaining the integrity of the balance, by insisting that humans do make free decisions which determine their eternal destiny.

This thesis suggests, therefore, that the hiddenness of the Christian God can be accounted for in trinitarian terms as follows. In terms of divine action, this

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<sup>1184</sup>It is recognised that the concept of '*personal* relation' encompasses a range of possible meanings, such as 'parent to child, friend to friend, friend to enemy, sovereign to servant' (Vanhoozer, 'Case Remains Unproven,' 284). This is an issue which would need to be more fully analysed and clarified in a full monograph on providence.

<sup>1185</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 2, 173-174. In Pannenberg's model, it is the contingency of events in world history, 'as an expression of the freedom of God in his action' (*Systematic* 1: 388; cf. *ibid.* 418), which *hides* the fact that the connections between events are rooted in God's action.

hiddenness is “seen” most obviously in the pre-mundane creative will of the Father, in the invisible “causal joint” between the Son (as source of form and structure of creation) and the properties of creaturely entities, and in the role of the Spirit as invisible energizer and enabler.<sup>1186</sup> The Spirit is self-effacing in order to protect creaturely otherness--the same pattern as seen in the Spirit’s presence in Jesus’ life and work (although a different ontology is involved). The Spirit enabled the miracles, but it was Jesus who was visible. Thus, one “sees” the Spirit only indirectly by the presence of his gifts--the basic gift of life, the human capacity for creativity, faith in Christ, and the gifts of the Spirit. Polkinghorne, for example, advocating ‘the flexible process of the world,’ is thereby able to model the active presence of God in the sacraments as the immanent working of the Spirit ‘within the openness of the Christian community’ in such a way that the Spirit does not intervene so much as interacts.<sup>1187</sup>

This “hidden” or self-effacing role of the Spirit’s providential action was manifested in a paradigmatic way in the incarnation of the Son. Kathryn Tanner, for example, suggests that the best way to relate the divinity and humanity of Jesus is to see them from the perspective of his life as a whole, and not as a matter of speculation about where the divine attributes stop and the human element begins. From this concrete perspective of the whole of the actual life of Jesus, ‘the second Person of the Trinity’s assumption of the human is as invisible as God’s acting to create and uphold the world: it transpires silently, behind the scenes; it makes no appearance in itself but is identifiable only in and from its effects. . . . the divinity of Jesus becomes an inference from the character of Jesus’ life and its effects.’<sup>1188</sup>

Thus, some level of hiddenness in God’s presence is intrinsic to the otherness-in-relation ontology which gives structure to the purpose God’s

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<sup>1186</sup>Cf. Pannenberg, ‘Insight and Faith,’ chap. in *Basic Questions in Theology*, vol. 2, trans. George H. Kehm, The Library of Philosophy and Theology, eds. John McIntyre, and Ian T. Ramsey (London, UK: SCM Press Ltd., 1971), 34-5, n. 11: ‘the operation of the Spirit of God in the creation remains utterly hidden.’

<sup>1187</sup>Polkinghorne, *Science and Providence*, 93, 86. A point requiring development beyond the scope of this project is that of clarifying the several senses of God’s ‘presence’ with creation. In the present work, primary focus is on God’s presence in the form of personal interaction with humans, rather than only on his creative/preservational ‘presence’ as the source of creaturely being.

<sup>1188</sup>Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity*, 16-18.



providential work. The created human other receives the power to be an other through the Spirit,<sup>1189</sup> takes the form of a community constituted in and by Christ,<sup>1190</sup> which in turn becomes the framework that determines the kind of meaning providence engenders.

Gunton differs from Pannenberg (as noted above) in ascribing to the Spirit the unique role of maintaining distinction between created entities. It might be better to say Christ is the principle of otherness or distinction, and the Spirit is the one who makes that otherness realisable in the creature. Nevertheless, Gunton helpfully lists three main functions ‘attributed to God as Spirit,’<sup>1191</sup> one of which is that of ‘the creator of community’<sup>1192</sup>: ‘God as Spirit is God making corporate community [that is, the church] possible and so liberating the energies of the individual precisely to be both with and for his fellows.’<sup>1193</sup> The Spirit is ‘the one whose distinctive function is to bring other persons into relationship while maintaining their otherness, their particular and unique freedom.’<sup>1194</sup> Again, Gunton’s language here implies that the Spirit actually has dual roles--maintaining distinction and creating relationship--which tends to minimise the role of the Son. It should be stressed, instead, that the maintenance of otherness is the function of the Son, although realised through the Spirit’s enabling work.

Another function of the Spirit refers to him as ‘a way of speaking of God at work in the believer, but in such a way as to respect the due independence and

<sup>1189</sup>Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, 59; cf. 51, 52, 55, 56, 90-91.

<sup>1190</sup>Gunton, *Triune Creator*, 10. Gunton states: ‘Jesus Christ is the one through whom all things take their shape and to whom the Spirit directs them’ (*Christ and Creation*, 97).

<sup>1191</sup>Gunton, *Enlightenment*, 104. In order to avoid the modalistic tone of this phrase, Gunton might better have said ‘God *the* Spirit.’

<sup>1192</sup>Gunton, *Enlightenment*, 103; idem, *Christ in Creation*, 46; idem, *Promise*, 51.

<sup>1193</sup>Gunton, *Enlightenment*, 106.

<sup>1194</sup>Gunton, *Promise*, 133. Gunton clarifies this thought further by saying, ‘The model for the otherness of the Spirit is, of course, the relation of Jesus to the Spirit in the Gospels, where the Spirit is portrayed as over against Jesus, driving him into the wilderness to be tempted, supporting him through the temptation and empowering the ministry that follows. All this demands a doctrine of the personal distinctness of the Holy Spirit in relation to both the Son and Father, and that in turn demands an abandonment of the Western *filioque* doctrine whose chief function is to prevent such an individuation’ (*Promise*, 131).



autonomy of the agent.<sup>1195</sup> This 'grace' is not 'mechanical,' nor 'irresistible,' but it is 'overcoming: on occasions overriding our refusal to emerge to freedom from our sinful past,' but 'more positively,' it is 'an enabling to do what should be done, not because it is "imposed" from the outside but because it is given from within.'<sup>1196</sup> Although Gunton does not clarify how this view avoids determinism, he insists this 'enabling' grace is not in conflict with our creaturely autonomy because it does not twist us "'into alien form'" but instead moulds us into our 'own most proper form.'<sup>1197</sup> Gunton approves John Oman's insistence that 'any conception of irresistible grace denies at once the personality of God and that of the objects of his grace.'<sup>1198</sup>

Perhaps, therefore, one could think of the Father, seen from the perspective of humans within creation, as the ultimate transcendent "pole" within the godhead, that is, as constituting an absolute personal Other such that relation to him must always be mediated through the Son by the Spirit. In this way the issue of divine transcendence and immanence can be seen as a matter of the level or aspect of providence one is speaking of at any given time. Stoeger sees God's transcendence and immanence as complementary aspects of God's 'causal activity': God as primary cause 'completely transcends secondary causality, and at the same time is perfectly immanent in secondary causality, supporting it and giving it efficacy.' As primary cause God's causality supersedes all our categories, and lack of epistemic access to this level of causality accounts for its hidden and ineffable character.<sup>1199</sup> For example, the Father's general oversight and provision for creation (sending 'rain on

<sup>1195</sup>Gunton, *Enlightenment*, 103.

<sup>1196</sup>Gunton, *Enlightenment*, 104.

<sup>1197</sup>Gunton, *Enlightenment*, 104.

<sup>1198</sup>Gunton, *Enlightenment*, 102.

<sup>1199</sup>Stoeger, 'Describing God's Action in the World in Light of Scientific Knowledge of Reality,' in *Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., eds. Robert John Russell, Nancey Murphy, and Arthur Peacocke, A Series on 'Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action,' ed. Robert John Russell (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications; Berkeley, CA: The Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 1997), 253.

the just and the unjust'<sup>1200</sup>) can be seen as the most transcendent aspect of the Trinity's providential relation to the world. The Son's particular role as mediator and redeemer of creation has a dual aspect: as *divine* Logos, he is the transcendent source of creation's structure and purpose; as *human* Son, he is 'God with us' and is therefore not just God immanent, but most importantly, *with* us on the level of *human* inter-personal interaction. The Holy Spirit, as the animating source of life and power is more distinctly God immanent.

In personal and relational terms, it is precisely through the *Son* and in the *Spirit* that the *Father* becomes known as Father. However, one cannot simply attribute hiddenness to the Father and revealedness to the Son and Spirit, since the Son's 'witness' retains an aspect of mystery, and the Spirit's sustaining presence continues to transcend human categories for personhood.

This hiddenness also extends to God's plan,<sup>1201</sup> presence and working, and is a necessary precondition for creaturely otherness in both the timeless and temporal views of God (albeit, for different reasons), and in both the neo-deistic and "interventionist" models of providence. Some authors, therefore, explain this hiddenness in terms of a necessary hiddenness defined, for example, as God's hidden lure or persuasive influence (Gilkey), or in terms of the grain of things (Wiles), or in terms of a '*psychological effect* in which we feel strength or consolation in time of grief or trouble.'<sup>1202</sup> In each case, the (partial) hiddenness of divine presence, activity, plan and purpose functions as a necessary presupposition for creaturely distinction from the creator. As William Stoeger points out,

God is not present and acting just as another cause, to fill causal gaps. . . . Rather, God is transcendentally and immanently, and thus pervasively, present as that which gives existence and distinct character to all that is, the ultimate immanent ground (immanent precisely because God is fully transcendent) of the created, temporal universe. God endows us and all things with existence and concreteness in such a

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<sup>1200</sup>Matt. 5:45 (RSV).

<sup>1201</sup>The term 'plan' as used here and subsequently is not meant to imply a fixed, pre-ordained blueprint, but rather God's general design and purpose for creation.

<sup>1202</sup>Kirkpatrick, *Together Bound*, 159.

radical way that God's presence and action is all but hidden from analysis.<sup>1203</sup>

Therefore, the *hiddenness* of much of God's providential presence and action becomes an intrinsic feature of the coherence of the God-world relationship.

In view of the above discussion, there can be no simplistic notion of God's care or presence. However defined, this God is not 'the rescue God who is allegedly always available to the religious person.'<sup>1204</sup> Such a God would not correspond with many Christians' experience of ambiguity and suffering in life. Rather, for many 'the absence of God in the death of Jesus becomes the place of the Presence of God through Jesus crucified dead.'<sup>1205</sup> For just this reason Moltmann's centring of God's relation to the world and the constitution of the triune identity in the event of the cross-resurrection is the strength of his "theodicy," and it meets the criterion of accounting for the negative experiences of life.<sup>1206</sup>

It has been argued in this thesis that the purpose behind God's providential working is the formation of a community with humans who participate, in finite forms, in the free self-donation of the inner-trinitarian love.<sup>1207</sup> From this basis one might account for some of the seeming ambiguity in the meaning and purpose of the suffering allowed in one's life, by relating this question to the nature of a community structured by love. Such a community, formed between the infinite triune Persons and finite humans, necessitates a deep sense of mystery. In Frank Kirkpatrick's words,

it is the mystery of relationship, the mystery of why love expresses itself in so many perplexing ways. Love is never susceptible to complete rational predictability or modeling.

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<sup>1203</sup>Stoeger, 'God and Time,' 368-369.

<sup>1204</sup>Tupper, *Scandalous Providence*, 194.

<sup>1205</sup>Tupper, *Scandalous Providence*, 194.

<sup>1206</sup>On the importance of this criterion, cf. Michael Welker, 'God's Eternity,' 324; John Polkinghorne, *Science and Providence*, 17, 64; Niels Gregersen, 'Providence in an Indeterministic World,' 17; and Wendy Farley, Review of *Escape from Paradise: Evil and Tragedy in Feminist Theology*, in *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* NS 16, no. 2 (1995): 258.

<sup>1207</sup>Cf. Volf, "The Trinity is our Social Program," 403-423.

Love is, by its very nature, surprising, transrational, and confusing. But it is not, for all that, irrational or absurd.<sup>1208</sup>

One of the key features of the divine love, in both the Reformed and Open Theist models, is that it seeks others with which to relate. On the one hand, Helm readily admits the mystery behind the motives of the divine creative and providential love, and chooses to account for this mystery in terms of the hidden will of God. On the other hand, Sanders and Pannenberg insist this purpose *requires* a world in which contingency, randomness, free process and human free will characterise the structures of life. John Polkinghorne writes:

I imagine God's guiding hand to be at work within the cloudiness of unpredictable open physical process. If that is the case, two things follow. One is that God's action will always be hidden. It will not be demonstrable by experiment, though it may be discernible by faith. The other is that God's providence is conceived as acting within the grain of natural process, not against it.<sup>1209</sup>

Polkinghorne's insistence that 'the future is not yet formed; it is not waiting for our arrival, for we make it as we go along,'<sup>1210</sup> accounts in part for Moltmann's emphasis on promise versus providential plan. It also accounts for Pinnock's insistence that the open and relational model of providence provides the most encouragement for human action: 'we are the way God's will gets done on earth!'<sup>1211</sup>

On either the Reformed or Open Theist view, perhaps one can relate the two concepts of God's hiddenness and revealed presence as follows: each is a matter of perspective. On the one hand, God's *hiddenness* or transcendence, which is sometimes mistaken for God's absence, is really a function of God's hidden

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<sup>1208</sup>Kirkpatrick, *Together Bound*, 160, 161.

<sup>1209</sup>Polkinghorne, *Serious Talk*, 53; cf. *ibid.*, 51-54.

<sup>1210</sup>Polkinghorne, *Serious Talk*, 54.

<sup>1211</sup>Pinnock, 'Evangelical Theologians Facing the Future: Ancient and Future Paradigms,' *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 33, no. 2 (Fall 1998): 27. Cf. Polkinghorne, *Serious Talk*, 88: 'I believe that divine and human coherence in prayer is genuinely instrumental; it can make things possible that would not be so if we and God were at cross-purposes'; cf. Pinnock, 'From Augustine to Arminius: A Pilgrimage in Theology,' in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, ed. Clark Pinnock (Grand Rapids, MI: Academia Books, an imprint of Zondervan Publishing House, 1989; Minneapolis, Minn: Bethany House Publishers, 1995), 18. Cf. also Philip Hefner's concept of humans as 'created co-creators' ('The Evolution of the Created Co-Creator,' in *Cosmos as Creation*, ed. Ted Peters [Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989]).

sustenance, his partially hidden plan, and government. These aspects of God's relation to the world are sovereign actions of God to the degree that they represent God's faithfulness to the kind of world he has created, and they ensure his transcendence to, and distinction from, the world.

On the other hand, God's *revealed presence* can be thought of in terms of our perception of his sustenance, our knowledge of his partially revealed plan, and our experience of his specific direction in both individual lives and in the life of those communities open to his guidance. In New Testament categories, God's revealed presence is further particularised according to the work of the trinitarian persons.<sup>1212</sup> Thus, the 'personal presence' aspect of God's relation to the world is interactional, and brings to our awareness God's immanence in the world. It is in the awareness of and interaction with God's presence that community, as a conscious reciprocal fellowship, becomes possible. This is the level of providence where 'communicative theism' becomes relevant, and where consciousness of the metaphysical principle of otherness-in-relation becomes intelligible.

There is, however, an important qualification to be added to the concept of God's providential absence and presence. Because God is not just an impersonal giver of life, but a *holy* and *personal* giver of life, there can be a violation of the rules of community between God and humans, at both the individual and corporate levels, which results in, not just hiddenness, but a true personal non-availability, a true *absence* of God. Frank Tupper points out that even Jesus, in the context of identifying with sinful humanity, experienced God's absence in this form.<sup>1213</sup> The question of God's personal presence and absence raises the question of the link between providence and personal experiences of grace.

### **Linking a Model of Providence to Personal Experiences of Grace**

The problems raised for providence because of the necessary hiddenness of divine providential working suggests that a community context for providence might

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<sup>1212</sup>Cf. John Fienberg, No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God, Foundations of Evangelical Theology, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001), 495-496.

<sup>1213</sup>Tupper, Scandalous Providence, 194.

further help in the retrieval of the doctrine by highlighting the personal aspect of both God and humans. Each of the authors reviewed above have insisted that God must be thought of in personal terms. Even though God transcends the concept of 'person' as used in reference to human persons, God nevertheless cannot be less than personal.

As seen in Helm's traditional view of providence, God's providential relation tends to be reduced to the one divine essence, expressed through the one divine will. Ironically, because he also worked with the category of causal language, Wiles felt the only option open to him was to adopt a neo-Deist view of the God-world relation in order to protect the integrity of the world, and especially human freedom.

As Vincent Brümmer argues, however, focus on the one divine essence and will leads to the kind of pan-causal language used by the Reformers in protecting God's sovereignty in matters of salvation. It tends to minimise the significance and role of God as *personal* and as open to personal *interaction* with humans.<sup>1214</sup> The concept of creation as aimed at forming community seems to be sacrificed to the concept of creation as a unilateral divine work *ad extra*. God, as a *personal* pan-causal agent, may have been suitable for a worldview which saw all of creation as God's direct handiwork, and which thought that God ruled by intervention.<sup>1215</sup> The orders of human society themselves provided a *personal* environment in which God's plan was worked out, with the Church and Christendom mediating the sense of God's care as personal. But when popular worldviews no longer included God's personal interventions as an essential component of history, the substitute and reductive idea of God as a hidden causal teleology in nature was not thought to be religiously significant. Thus, any reconstruction of providence would seem to require a way to root the doctrine in the *personal* relation of God to the world, and especially to humans. One way to do this that is faithful to the New Testament basis

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<sup>1214</sup>Brümmer, *Speaking of a Personal God: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 83-89.

<sup>1215</sup>Cf. John Wesley's view of providence, formed in the context of a Newtonian view of the universe, where God must suspend the laws of nature in order to answer prayer (John Wesley, 'On Divine Providence,' *Sermons*, vol. 2, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 6, [London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872; repr., Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1978], 315, 322).



of Christianity is to begin reconstruction from the perspective of the church's experience as a grace-established, providentially guided community, that is, in trinitarian soteriology and ecclesiology.

John Polkinghorne points out that 'motivation for belief in divine providence is found in the religious experiences of prayer and of trust in a God who guides.'<sup>1216</sup> Moltmann makes a similar point as to the source of belief in the Trinity: 'We have seen that the knowledge and the representation of the immanent Trinity is to be found in the sphere of doxology, which responds to the experience of salvation and anticipates the kingdom of glory.'<sup>1217</sup> Because doctrines of providence are the constructions of human creatures,<sup>1218</sup> it seems that the personal human experience of transforming grace within the present situation of the world is that which fuels faith in God's general providence, in God's wise directing of cosmic and human history toward the realisation of his kingdom. In the end, faith in general providence requires a concrete focus in special providence, for example, in prayer and personal transforming grace. The connection to prayer and grace indicates a soteriological, christological, pneumatological, and therefore, trinitarian basis for providence.<sup>1219</sup> Frank Kirkpatrick contends that, in addition to the decisive acts of God in history to ensure the success of his ultimate goal of liberation,

Christians also claim an ongoing, present experience of God's acts in history, namely the experience in their own lives or in the lives of those whose witness they are willing to credit, of divine grace, presence, comfort, and healing. These experiences, as we have suggested, provide the indispensable

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<sup>1216</sup>John Polkinghorne, 'The Metaphysics of Divine Action,' in Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., eds. Robert John Russell, Nancey Murphy, and Arthur Peacocke, a series on 'Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action,' ed. Robert John Russell. (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications; Berkeley, CA: The Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 1997), 155.

<sup>1217</sup>Moltmann, Trinity and the Kingdom, 161.

<sup>1218</sup>Ruth Page points out that there may well be an unavoidable anthropocentrism in our categories, terms, and models when speaking about God and God's relation to the world, even when referring to the non-human world (Web of Creation, 105-112). This is also recognised by Denis Edwards in his insistence that all human experiences, including of God's action, 'must be mediated in consciousness through images, concepts, words, and stories, all of which are socially and historically conditioned' ('Discovery of Chaos,' 172).

<sup>1219</sup>Cf. Thomas Finger, 'Trinity, Ecology and Panentheism,' 91-92; and Gary Badcock, Light of Truth, 253-256.

counterpart to any attempt to find evidence of God's acts in previous histories.<sup>1220</sup>

This is the case whether special providence and the experience of prayer are interpreted in very subjective terms (Wiles) or in more objective and interactionist terms (Sanders). As Peter Hodgson notes, 'we are empowered to struggle for a better tomorrow *just because* we are sustained by God's amazing grace, suffused by divine presence, today. The transhistorical horizon invigorates the historical field.'<sup>1221</sup> In a similar vein Kirkpatrick concludes: 'But wherever we find sustained and sustaining communities of love, we believe, we find continuing evidence of God's work in the world, precisely because those communities seem to be the underlying, continuing, constant intention of God throughout all of biblically recorded history.'<sup>1222</sup>

The connection of providence to personal experiences of grace is important, since a trinitarian doctrine of providence must not remain an abstract doctrine, but demonstrate its usefulness for helping the Christian negotiate life as lived *coram Trinitatis*.

### **Providence, Eschatology, Sabbath and Community**

It would seem that if one is going to reclaim a doctrine of providence as a context of meaning, not only for individual lives in the present, but as providing a sense of meaning and significance for individual, corporate and cosmic history as a whole, then some explicit link to eschatology is required.

It was noted in Chapter Two, on the one hand, that Wiles limits coverage of eschatology to some speculations on the immortality of the individual soul. Gilkey, on the other hand, emphasised the importance of history as a divine-human creative enterprise, and as such it in some way must be redeemed (since individuals only exist in historical communities),<sup>1223</sup> but he, too, had little to say about eschatology and final hope. Moreover, in his concern to instantiate human freedom over against

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<sup>1220</sup>Kirkpatrick, *Together Bound*, 152-3, 153; cf. *ibid.*, 127, 130-131, 162.

<sup>1221</sup>Peter Hodgson, *Winds of the Spirit: A Constructive Christian Theology* (London, UK: SCM Press Ltd., 1994), 327.

<sup>1222</sup>Kirkpatrick, *Together Bound*, 153.

<sup>1223</sup>Cf. Gilkey, *Reaping*, 297.

classical views of providence, Gilkey avoided the concept of divine governance of the world, a neglect which militates against the achievability of God's ultimate goal for the universe.

In order to facilitate the providential redemption of both the corporate and individual aspects of historical existence, perhaps one could think, not in terms of *time* as an undifferentiated sequence (*chronos*), but rather in terms of *times*. As described above, these times are intra-permeable, because the Trinity is related equally to all times as their transcendent ground. For this reason the Trinity is able to become, through the Son and the Spirit, the medium in which the character or quality of a particular time, as *chronos* (quantity), can be transformed into *kairos* (quality),<sup>1224</sup> and therefore redeemed and included in the divine eternity in a finite way. This is possible on the view that the 'eternity of the Trinity is essentially temporal, as long as we understand the essence of temporality in terms of relationality.'<sup>1225</sup> On the basis of this metaphysics, time is also *internal* to created reality, that is, an abstraction from, or a function of, the quality of the relations between entities. From this viewpoint it is what *happens* to those entities that determines the quality of the time associated with them. This notion is similar to the different kinds of time in Welker's model of divine action.

Whether or not one accepts such a definition of eternity, as argued above, eternity must be seen as capable of intersecting with time, or better, capable of including time within itself, if what happens in time is to be redeemed. Only in this way is it possible for Moltmann's idea of the Sabbath rest as God's goal of eternal community between the divine and the creaturely to be achieved. All times and places, shaped by the historical time of the Son (Welker), with their 'maimed, neglected or suppressed hopes,' are in fact subject to the recreative power of God's

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<sup>1224</sup>Tillich defines 'the *kairos* [as], the times in which the eternal breaks into the temporal' (*Existence and The Christ*, vol. 2, *Systematic Theology* [Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1957], 164). Cf. Outler, *Who Trusts in God: Musings on the Meaning of Providence* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1968), 48-51.

<sup>1225</sup>William Stoeger, 'God and Time,' 376; cf. *ibid.*, 365-388.

future, as made possible by God's Spirit.<sup>1226</sup> This Sabbath rest indicates a permanence of the *conditions* for eternal community with God, but it need not imply the end of the creative project--God's eternity remains open. This can be extrapolated from the concept of Sabbath in the creation story of the Bible.

The Sabbath rest concept, therefore, also has relevance for present providence. As Leo Scheffczyk points out, 'God's "Sabbath rest"' is a theological concept, and

has a thoroughly positive meaning: it declares not that the world is unfinished, but that its basic structure is complete and that creative activity has now been extended so as to establish a new relationship between God and the world. God's sabbath rest affirms his benevolent attitude towards the created world. It is our assurance that this world is now the object of God's affection and sustaining care.<sup>1227</sup>

This sabbath concept reveals the basis in creation for God's relation and attitude toward the world. God established and sustains an environment for human thriving, the key element of which is a free engagement with God in community. As Outler puts it, the purpose of providence is to maintain a world in which human freedom and possibility are upheld, a world that is 'the arena in which God's righteousness becomes man's blessedness. This is what our lives are for: to receive the kingdom through Christ its bearer and to share with him the love of the Father in the Holy Spirit.'<sup>1228</sup>

The very necessity of working for one's daily bread ensures that humans receive their life, at least in part, *indirectly* from God, that is, through secondary causes. This ensures their otherness, and therefore establishes the basis for I-Thou relationships with God.<sup>1229</sup>

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<sup>1226</sup>Moltmann, The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions, trans. Margaret Kohl (London, UK: SCM Press Ltd., 1990), 238-240; cf. also Moltmann, Coming of God, 294-295.

<sup>1227</sup>Scheffczyk, Creation and Providence, 11.

<sup>1228</sup>Outler, Who Trusts, 105.

<sup>1229</sup>However, Welker rightly notes that such 'anthropological . . . figures of thought' as that of 'I-Thou' relationships are 'insufficient' when thinking of human relations to the Trinity ('Gods' Eternity,' 319, n. 2). This inadequacy points to the need for further refinement of language when speaking of divine-human relationships.

The ontology for this is based in a trinitarian doctrine of creation. 'Creation through the Word' reflects

that the Creator is a personal and spiritual being as well as the transcendent Lord; but it also wishes to stress the essential difference of created being from the divine being--Creation by means of the Word is to exclude any idea of emanationism or pantheism.

Yet the creative Word does not merely distinguish and separate, it also produces community and continuity; for if Creation came into being through God's word, it must always remain open to this Word, it can never retire from out of the range of the Word which has established it.<sup>1230</sup>

This openness to the creative Word can be related to the freedom of God to 'break into the course of his creation and initiate new events in it in an unpredictable way.'<sup>1231</sup> As Gunton argues, what might be interpreted as miraculous divine activity, is in reality 'natural,' since 'what is natural is that which enables the creation to achieve its promised destiny.'<sup>1232</sup> God's promises, combined with his providential actions that ensure their fulfilment, makes history possible: 'The tension between promise and fulfillment makes history.'<sup>1233</sup> Thus, it is the action of the Trinity which first creates history, incorporates human actions into that history, and then unifies all actions (divine and human) into a coherent whole.<sup>1234</sup> The proleptic realisation in the present of the future rule of God in which God will dwell with his people, is realised in the present economy by the Spirit's non-coercive calling together of a community formed around the 'crucified and risen Lord.'<sup>1235</sup> Thus, 'the Spirit is . . . the agent and mediator of the rule of Christ in both judgement and salvation until he [Christ] hands over the rule to God the Father at the end of the age.'<sup>1236</sup> The ability of God to

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<sup>1230</sup>Scheffczyk, Creation and Providence, 8.

<sup>1231</sup>Wolfhart Pannenberg, 'Redemptive Event and History,' chap. in Basic Questions in Theology, Collected Essays, vol. 1, trans. George H. Kehm (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1970), 18.

<sup>1232</sup>Gunton, Triune Creator, 176, 177.

<sup>1233</sup>Wolfhart Pannenberg, 'Redemptive Event and History,' 19.

<sup>1234</sup>Pannenberg, Systematic 2: 6-7, 68-9.

<sup>1235</sup>Gunton, Promise, 173.

<sup>1236</sup>Gunton, Promise, 174.



act faithfully and yet freely (in the form of promise and in the form of creating the new), and to overrule creaturely intents, is the basis for meaning in history.

If one accepts the close connection between Trinity, creation, salvation, providence and eschatology, then salvation can be understood as something more than a one-dimensional forensic transaction between the Father and the Son.<sup>1237</sup> One can see the gift given as not only a legal transaction for sins, but 'as a ransom for many'<sup>1238</sup> in the larger sense of making humans 'partakers of the divine nature.'<sup>1239</sup>

In this way one can see it as transformational in purpose (effecting holiness in the present<sup>1240</sup>) and trinitarian in structure. This perspective implies seeing humans as being written into the relation between Father and Son, through the Holy Spirit. The already-not-yet characteristic of the church's life expresses the present movement of this salvific presence of the Trinity within the context of human history. The economic Trinity, active in the world by the creative, sustaining Spirit, is manifested linguistically and liturgically (and thereby concretely and doxologically) by the ecclesiological symbols of Word and Sacrament, making present the Father and Son ('truly our fellowship is with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ'<sup>1241</sup>). In the words of John Milbank, 'since God is not an object in the world, he cannot be available to us before our response to him, but in this response--our work, our gift, our art, our hymn--he is already present.'<sup>1242</sup> The church, defined thusly, reveals the "moment" in and through which the Trinity has opened the inner-

<sup>1237</sup>Cf. Henry Spaulding II, 'The Path of Peaceful Flight: Milbank's Trinitarian Ontology and a Re-Narration of Wesleyan-Holiness Theology,' *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 147-149, 151, n. 67, 153, 155, 158.

<sup>1238</sup>Mark 10:45 RSV.

<sup>1239</sup>2 Peter 1:4 RSV; Cf. Spaulding, 'Path of Peaceful Flight,' 155: 'Salvation is not only forensic; it is therapeutic.'

<sup>1240</sup>The importance of right-relating in all dimensions of relationship, traditionally expressed in terms of sanctification and holiness, is similar in concept to Ruth Page's 'teleology now' in which 'every moment becomes eschatological, an end in itself, so to speak' in the context of the 'divine presence . . . seeking response, mutual relationship and concurrence which echoes Jesus Christ's in the enlargement of freedom and love in this world' (*Web of Creation*, 63, 64; cf. *ibid.*, 63-73).

<sup>1241</sup>1 Jn. 1:3 (RSV).

<sup>1242</sup>John Milbank, 'Intensities,' *Modern Theology*, 15, no. 4 (October 1999): 486; quoted in Spaulding, 'Path of Peaceful Flight,' 173-177.



divine life to the world. This opening is intrinsically redemptive, since ‘salvation has always been given, even from the foundation of the world.’<sup>1243</sup> And it is also intrinsically creative and therefore providential. The Incarnation (taken here as a comprehensive symbol of the whole Christ event) is not only redemptive in the sense of being remedial; it redeems by completion as well, completion of salvation *and* creation, issuing in the eschatological ‘Kingdom of Glory’ (Moltmann).

### Relating Trinitarian Providence to Human Freedom

As several of the authors reviewed above have argued, the goal of creation and providence is the establishment of created others with whom the Trinity may form a fellowship, understood in terms of the kingdom of God, the church, or as a divine-human community. The goal and pattern humans are meant to exhibit is that of the free relation of the Son to the Father, as mediated by the Holy Spirit.<sup>1244</sup>

The nature of human freedom, as defined by one’s view of divine sovereignty, was noted in Chapter One as constituting a complex topic and longstanding philosophical debate in its own right within a model of providence. Moreover, this debate becomes even more complex when one recognises the close link between one’s model of divine sovereignty/human freedom and the theodicy question. Since the chosen foci of this thesis have been the questions of whether a doctrine of providence should be trinitarian, and how a doctrine of providence addresses the issue of history, meaning and hope, the freedom debate has not been a primary focus.<sup>1245</sup> However, since the issue of human freedom recurs so persistently in the treatments of providence referred to in foregoing chapters, it is important to ask how a specifically *trinitarian* view of providence relates to this issue.

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<sup>1243</sup>Spaulding, ‘Path of Peaceful Flight,’ 153. Cf. Robert Jenson, *The Works of God*, vol. 2, *Systematic Theology* [Oxford, UK; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999], 14-15.

<sup>1244</sup>Cf. Robert Jenson’s appropriation of Jonathan Edwards’ understanding of human participation in the relation between the Son and the Father: ‘As the union of God and creature becomes “more and more . . . perfect,” what this means is that it becomes “nearer . . . to that between God the Father and the Son”’ (*The Works of God*, 19).

<sup>1245</sup>See p. 37, above.

An initial response to this question involves a methodological issue. As noted in Chapter One, some trinitarian theologians (such as Pannenberg and Moltmann) do not begin with a doctrine of providence and then ask if making it trinitarian facilitates its retrieval or adds to its credibility, nor do they begin by asking whether making a doctrine of providence trinitarian facilitates a better understanding of human freedom. Rather, they begin with the claim that the Christian God *is* triune, and only then ask what this might mean for providence.<sup>1246</sup> Insofar as providence addresses the freedom question, this too, must be addressed within a trinitarian context.

Second, in keeping with the Community MODEL adopted here, I am presupposing that the triune persons (as manifested in the economy) form a community of free beings.<sup>1247</sup> If, by extension, one accepts that God creates humans for participation in that community, then one may assume that he creates them as free persons.<sup>1248</sup> As already noted, Frank Tupper, Colin Gunton, Norman Kraus, Kathryn Tanner and others have argued that it is in the Christ event (the definitive triune act) that one finds the hermeneutical key for understanding God's providential relationship to the world. Pannenberg and Moltmann have also contended that in a trinitarian understanding of creation and providence one discovers the irreducible trinitarian structure through which God relates to humans.<sup>1249</sup> For Moltmann, this trinitarian context for freedom unfolds as follows: the Father provides the freedom of

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<sup>1246</sup>That is, they begin with a focus on a doctrine of the Trinity as grammatical rule. Cf. Claude Welch's affirmation that 'trinitarianism is not an inductive conclusion from *scientia*, but an *arché*, a presupposition of thought which is given to men in the new *logos* in Christ' (In This Name: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Contemporary Theology [New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952], 245). See also, p. 27, above.

<sup>1247</sup>As Miroslav Volf cautions, one cannot assume a straightforward analogy between divine and human community, since divine ontology is of an entirely different order than creaturely ("The Trinity is our Social Program": The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement,' Modern Theology 14 (July 1998): 413, 414). Cf. similar cautions by Ian McFarland (Difference and Identity: A Theological Anthropology [Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2001], 136-137), and Kathryn Tanner (Jesus, Humanity, 82-83).

<sup>1248</sup>This claim does not yet address the issue of which kind of freedom may be in play on either level.

<sup>1249</sup>Pannenberg, Systematic 2: 438; idem, Systematic 1: 259, 262, 314; cf. Moltmann for a similar view (The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology [London, UK: SCM Press Ltd., 1974], 240-241). Cf. Gary Badcock, Light of Truth, 271.

creative potential in the form of an invitation to freely love,<sup>1250</sup> an invitation to community<sup>1251</sup>; the Son provides the restoration of a freedom for potential lost in the ‘servitude to sin’; and the Spirit provides the resources to participate in ‘the energies of the new creation.’<sup>1252</sup> In Pannenberg’s model of providence, this trinitarian structure is required precisely because the cross and resurrection reveal the Father’s deity, lordship and rule over history, as mediated through the work of the Son and Spirit,<sup>1253</sup> --‘for the revelation of the deity and lordship of the Father depends on the work of the Son and Spirit.’<sup>1254</sup> Pannenberg stresses that ‘the activity of the Son through the Spirit of God comprises the entire economy of God’s action in creating, reconciling, and uniting the world of creatures to himself.’<sup>1255</sup>

In this structure, taking again as hermeneutical key the relation of the Son to the Father,<sup>1256</sup> one discovers in the Father’s free giving of himself to the Son, and in the Son’s free self-distinction from the Father and free obedience to the Father (both movements mediated by the free activity of the Spirit of love), the pattern for human relating to the Trinity. This structure of freedom and being, as manifested in the interrelations of the divine Persons of the economic Trinity, becomes the divine analogue for understanding human freedom *coram Trinitatis*.

This level of discussion about freedom represents a somewhat different focus than asking *which kind* of freedom is in play in these relations--a special concern of Helm and Sanders. Rather, it addresses the question about the economic identity of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and how that relocates the question of human freedom from philosophical debates about what freedom *must be* (volitional or libertarian), to reflection on what freedom *actually looks like*, as modelled by Jesus

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<sup>1250</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 209, 217, 163.

<sup>1251</sup>Cf. Bauckham, *Theology of Moltmann*, 176-177.

<sup>1252</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 210, 211.

<sup>1253</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 315.

<sup>1254</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 322.

<sup>1255</sup>Pannenberg, *Introduction*, 68.

<sup>1256</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 1: 273, 299.

Christ. Admittedly, these two questions cannot be ultimately separated, but they do represent different starting points for discussion about human freedom.

There are at least three, interrelated issues requiring recognition here. First, there is the theological question of how human freedom is instantiated when it is the result of the Trinity's preservation of, cooperation with, and governance of humans. Second, there is the spiritual formation question of how this freedom actually comes to be established in humans--a spiritual, psychological and developmental question. Finally, there is the more philosophical question as to what kind of freedom this is. Addressing these issues in reverse order, I will first make some brief observations about the latter two points, and then devote the remainder of this section to the first issue.

With regard to which kind of human freedom is appropriate to one's view of divine sovereignty, the authors reviewed in this thesis have chosen between two broad options: either an Augustinian/Calvinist view of freedom (volitional), or an Arminian type (libertarian). As noted in Chapter Three, however, the ultimate choice one makes between these two families of views on human freedom depends upon one's hermeneutic of scripture<sup>1257</sup> and upon one's larger model of the God-world relation. Although outside the scope of the present thesis for development and defence, as indicated in Chapter Three,<sup>1258</sup> my own preference would be for a Wesleyan-Arminian view which stresses not only *free will*<sup>1259</sup> (Arminius), but free will only as it is made possible by *free grace* mediated (preveniently) by the Holy Spirit (John Wesley).<sup>1260</sup> In this model, *establishment* of the ground for relationship

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<sup>1257</sup>John Feinberg, arguing for a compatibilist view of human freedom, recognises that 'no [biblical] verse tells us whether freedom is indeterministic or deterministic' ('God Ordains All Things,' in Predestination and Freewill: Four Views on Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom by John Feinberg, Norman Geisler, Bruce Reichenbach, Clark Pinnock, ed. David Basinger and Randall Basinger [Downers Grove, ILL: InterVarsity Press, 1986], 32).

<sup>1258</sup>See n. 471, above.

<sup>1259</sup>Tomis Kapitan notes that 'it is debated whether freedom is properly ascribed to the will or the agent, or to actions, choices, deliberations, etc.' (Robert Audi, ed. The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy [New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1995], s.v. 'free will problem,' by Tomis Kapitan).

<sup>1260</sup>H. Ray Dunning suggests prevenient grace is so much the work of the Spirit that it can be understood as 'synonymous with the work of the Spirit' (Grace, Faith, and Holiness: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology [Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1988], 430).

(through the Son), and the *enabling* of relationship (through the Spirit), is all of grace--‘the initiation is God’s and also the enabling.’<sup>1261</sup> It *remains*, however, for the human individual to *exercise* the Spirit-enabled acceptance of the Father’s offer of relationship in order for that grace to take effect.<sup>1262</sup> The reason for this latter assertion is to allow for humans to be held responsible for their free choices.<sup>1263</sup> The point being made here, however, is not to develop a defence of libertarian free will, but to point out that one’s choice in this matter (for either volitional or libertarian freedom) does not depend solely upon whether one’s view of God is trinitarian or unitarian. Rather, one’s preference in this matter emerges as an integral feature of the requirements for *coherence* among the many beliefs, doctrines, assumptions and arguments that make up one’s *whole model* of the God-world relation.

The second question above, of how humans in their personal life-histories *come to have* or *develop* freedom, would involve developing a model of spiritual formation based upon a doctrine of redemption and a theological anthropology--with some reference to the physical, mental, psychological and spiritual constitution and development of humans. In other words, it would involve addressing *how one comes to have* freedom rather than what that freedom (as end result) looks like. Wiles, Gilkey and Moltmann, for example, stressed that the *telos* for human freedom was that of a *freely chosen* relation of love to God, such that disobedience would no

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<sup>1261</sup>Timothy L. Smith, ‘A Historical and Contemporary Appraisal of Wesleyan Theology,’ in *A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology: Biblical, Systematic, and Practical*, vol. 1, ed. Charles W. Carter (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press of Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), 65; cf. *ibid.*, 64-65. Cf. Dunning, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness*, 431-441.

<sup>1262</sup>I recognise, of course, that this is a highly debated proposal. Roy C. Weatherhead, for example, wonders whether it is possible to ever identify what the ‘entity--whether called mind, soul, self, agent, or originator’--is which makes this undetermined decision (Ted Honderich, ed. *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* [Oxford, UK; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1995], s.v., ‘Freedom and Determinism’). Cf. David Fergusson’s view which stresses the role of prevenient grace as necessary in accounting for ‘human responsibility,’ although Fergusson does not ‘place any emphasis upon belief as a free act.’ Nevertheless, he stresses that ‘only a theology that recognizes the freedom finally to rebel against God can avoid the determinism of either double predestination or universalism’ (‘Will the Love of God Finally Triumph,’ in *Nothing Greater, Nothing Better: Theological Essays on the Love of God*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, 186-202. Cambridge, UK; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001 201, n. 33, 196). Cf. also the debate in Basinger and Basinger, eds., *Predestination and Freewill*.

<sup>1263</sup>Cf. Vincent Brümmer’s argument that libertarian free will is necessary for human responsibility, and that this set of conditions is necessary in order to have personal relations of love with a personal God (*Speaking of a Personal God: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* [Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992], 139-145).



longer be chosen. This was to be *achieved* through the patience of the Father in successfully “persuading” (Wiles), luring (Gilkey), and inviting (Moltmann) all humans to see the wisdom of joining with the Son in eternally and freely loving and obeying the Father.<sup>1264</sup> However, the actual psychological mechanism by which such a goal can be achieved, without ultimately violating libertarian freedom, was left unexplored and ambiguous. For Helm, the *goal* is similar: all those humans who eventually come to choose salvation will do so because they *want* to do so, *as determined by God’s hidden providential working*. Helm’s model, however, did not explore *how* this would be achieved (psychologically), perhaps because he could appeal to the hidden, *unilateral*, creative and providential working of God.

It is to the first issue noted above that I want to devote the remainder of this section: how is human freedom instantiated when it is the result of trinitarian providence? Since humans are created to bear the image of the Son,<sup>1265</sup> Pannenberg notes that human independence, and therefore, freedom, is assured by participation in the Son. This amounts to

the freedom of a new immediacy to God that believers have as his children (Gal. 4:4-6). It is mediated by the sending of the Son and his vicarious death. It is actualized, however, by the Spirit of sonship in believers themselves. The Spirit thus brings the mission of the Son to completion.<sup>1266</sup>

It is the Spirit who leads believers into the truth ‘which makes them free.’<sup>1267</sup> This is the freedom of participating with the Son (through the Spirit) in freely chosen filial obedience to the Father.<sup>1268</sup>

Gunton pictures this trinitarian framework of freedom as follows: ‘the world has its “inscape” provided by the Son, the one who became part of the world for the

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<sup>1264</sup>And since this process is clearly not successful for every human in *this* life, it would seem to require a continuance of the process after death.

<sup>1265</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 2: 208, 220, 230.

<sup>1266</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 2: 436-437.

<sup>1267</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 2: 437.

<sup>1268</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic* 2: 57, 173-174.



sake of the world, and the Spirit, whose characteristic form of action is to enable the world to become itself.<sup>1269</sup> Kathryn Tanner takes this further by noting that

the Holy Spirit unites us in Christ even as the Holy Spirit encourages the uniqueness of our persons by a diversity of gifts of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit respects our differences while uniting us in Christ in the same way that the Holy Spirit respects and maintains the differences between Father and Son even as it attests to and bears the love of the Son back to the Father.<sup>1270</sup>

Human freedom is a function of the Spirit's enabling of creaturely otherness as it is defined by identity in Christ.

In Moltmann's terms, the freedom God provides and enables through the Son and Spirit is 'freedom as initiative, as creativity and as a passion for the future.'<sup>1271</sup> It works not by imposition, but as a calling--'liberation from . . . ['closed-in-ness'] cannot come about through superior strength or compulsion, but only through vicarious suffering and the call to that liberty which vicarious suffering alone throws open.'<sup>1272</sup> This is a multifaceted freedom, defined as 'community,' 'fellowship,' or 'love and solidarity,' and freedom as oriented to a '*project*,' as 'a creative initiative,' as a 'creative passion for the possible,' and hence as oriented toward the pregnant future.<sup>1273</sup>

Although the present project cannot engage the longstanding philosophical debate about whether human freedom is of the '(liberty) of indifference' kind, or of the '(liberty) of spontaneity' type,<sup>1274</sup> I will, however, make a distinction between

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<sup>1269</sup>Gunton, The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity, The 1992 Bampton Lectures (New York, NY; Melbourne, Australia; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 229.

<sup>1270</sup>Tanner, Jesus, Humanity, 83. In referring to the Holy Spirit as 'it,' Tanner seems to compromise the personal nature of the Spirit.

<sup>1271</sup>Moltmann, Trinity and the Kingdom, 218.

<sup>1272</sup>Moltmann, Trinity and the Kingdom, 218, 210. Cf. Pannenberg's assertion that God's 'influence on the creature's freedom [takes] the form of persuasion and accommodation' (Systematic 2: 48, 48, n. 117, 52).

<sup>1273</sup>Moltmann, Trinity and the Kingdom, 216-217.

<sup>1274</sup>Cf. Robert Audi, ed. The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1995), s.v. 'free will problem,' by Tomis Kapitan. Cf. also the debate in Predestination and Freewill, ed. David Basinger and Randall Basinger.

freedom as the ability to choose between options, and a more relational definition of freedom as the ability to be free *for* something, in this case, free *for* God.<sup>1275</sup> As Moltmann argues, we are only truly free when we are free to actualise our true destiny of relating to God, which involves ‘joy in the Good and in doing what is right simply as a matter of course.’<sup>1276</sup> It is the restoration of this freedom *for* God which a doctrine of redemption addresses, and therefore which again brings into focus the providential work of the Trinity as the divine means of orchestrating this redemptive possibility. How that freedom is instantiated or realised, therefore, is by means of a trinitarian structure: participation in the Son’s filial obedience to the Father, as enabled by the Spirit. In this case, freedom is understood as freedom *for* God, *for* others, and *for* one’s true self.<sup>1277</sup>

The possibility of human freedom, and the experience of it, are rooted in the trinitarian acts of creation, providence, redemption and consummation. As Gunton puts it, ‘if Jesus Christ is a model of God’s determination of the creature, then clearly it is a determination that realises rather than stunts freedom.’<sup>1278</sup> In this model it is the Spirit who enables the human Jesus to be truly himself.<sup>1279</sup> Thus, ‘the Son of God in free personal relation to the world . . . is the basis for an understanding of God the Father’s relations with his creation.’<sup>1280</sup> Just as knowledge of the purpose of

<sup>1275</sup>H. Ray Dunning, following Dietrich Bonhoeffer, defines freedom relationally as “‘being free for the other.’” As such it is defined by four basic relations: ‘(1) Freedom for God; (2) Freedom for the Other; (3) Freedom from the Earth or World; and (4) Freedom from Self-domination. The first three are explicitly spelled out symbolically in Genesis 1-11, and the fourth is implied quite clearly in the other three’ (*Grace, Faith, and Holiness*, 278-279). Cf. Gunton for a somewhat similar relational understanding of freedom (*Christ and Creation*, 107).

<sup>1276</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 214. Similarly, Pannenberg notes that humans are only truly free when they freely come to accept their creaturehood and freely obey the Father (*Systematic* 2: 180). Cf. also, Frank Tupper, ‘The Providence of God in Christological Perspective,’ 582.

<sup>1277</sup>As noted above, Gunton makes the point that one of the Spirit’s roles is to liberate ‘the energies of the individual precisely to be both *with* and *for* his fellows,’ to free us for our ‘own most proper form’ (*Enlightenment*, 106, 104 [italics mine]).

<sup>1278</sup>Gunton, *Triune Creator*, 183.

<sup>1279</sup>Gunton, ‘End of Causality?’, 79, 80; cf. idem, *Promise*, 131; and idem, *Triune Creator*, 184.

<sup>1280</sup>Gunton, *Triune Creator*, 183.

God derives paradigmatically from Christ, so the knowledge of, and shape of, freedom derives from the same source.

I would suggest, therefore, that what a *trinitarian* doctrine of providence especially brings to the discussion of human freedom can be summarised in the following two points. First, a trinitarian doctrine of providence takes as its starting point a biblically based, irreducible trinitarian structure: we are constituted as human persons by graced participation within the structure of relating to the Father through the Son in the Spirit.<sup>1281</sup>

Second, this trinitarian structure enables the development of a biblical and theological concept of freedom as freedom *for* God and others, as enabled by participation in the relations of the economic Trinity. What the trinitarian discussion offers is a model of God in which the triune God, out of the free dynamic of the inner-trinitarian relations, is able to “go out” into creation (through the Son), and bring the creation back “into” the dynamic love of the triune godhead through the Spirit. This is for humans a ‘participation’ in those relations by grace, not a divinisation of humans, thus maintaining the ontological distinction between the divine and human. This distinction is further reinforced by the fact that humans do not relate to each of the divine Persons in the same way. Thus, a trinitarian doctrine of providence provides a theological/trinitarian structure for human freedom. Within that narratively encoded, providentially orchestrated, freedom, one discovers a theological (patrological) *purpose* for freedom, a christological *shape* for freedom, and a pneumatological *enabling* of that freedom.

This trinitarian structure of freedom may imply a circularity between the notions of participating in the Trinity and being free: Is participating in the relations of the economic Trinity the prior condition of human freedom or is it what human freedom looks like? It is the *divine initiative* in creative, providential and redemptive grace which breaks this apparent circularity, and which prevents a semi-Pelagian view of human freedom. From a Wesleyan-Arminian perspective, one might say that one is already constituted as human by being included in the economic trinitarian

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<sup>1281</sup> Since all of creation, both the human and the non-human, is from the Father, through the Son and by the Spirit, one could extrapolate from this same formal trinitarian structure of being and freedom and suggest that each created entity, in accordance with its own level of complexity and set of properties, is instantiated by the same trinitarian structure.

relations (as mediated through Christ, and as a gift of grace prior to any response by humans), but this only becomes effectual in one's life as one actively accepts this grace (faith). A key part of this givenness of being included in Christ involves the restorative work of the Spirit in awakening the possibility of a positive attitude toward God, and in enabling one to respond positively to saving grace. Thus, on the one hand all are given the option of being restored to right relation to God (in Christ), and, therefore, at this minimal level 'participation' in the trinitarian relations is a prior given, while on the other hand, it only becomes a reality when one acts on the grace already received--the act of accepting faith. At that point participation in the trinitarian relations (through Christ and in the Spirit) are actualised, and also at that point that is what freedom looks like (as modelled definitively by Christ's relation to the Father in the Spirit). In a way analogous to a doctrine of the original creation of humans in which God first established humans with the freedom to continue in right relation to him or to refuse to do so,<sup>1282</sup> in his re-creative work the Spirit of God first establishes the basis and possibility of right response prior to the human individual's use of this ability. Whether one understands the prevenient work of the Spirit as an effectual call (in a determinist sense) or as an enabling call (in an indeterminist sense) the point is that all initiation of re-creative grace is a unilateral work of the triune God.

Utilising a modified view of Bauckham's 'spatial' model of freedom, one might suggest a trinitarian shape for providence and freedom as follows. Beginning with a christological focus, it is human participation in the *Son's free otherness* from and for Father and Spirit which ensures *human free otherness* from and for Father and Spirit.<sup>1283</sup> In this way the divine *cooperation* with humans can be ascribed to the Son (structure and *withness*; Bauckham: God 'alongside us'). The Spirit can be understood as having the *sustaining* role of preserving humans in being *as sons and daughters* (empowerment and "*in-ness*"; Bauckham: God 'within us'). This

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<sup>1282</sup>Cf. Pannenberg, *Systematic* 2:166-167.

<sup>1283</sup>Again, it must be noted that there remains also a distinction of human sons/daughters from the divine Son, even while the human participates in the Son. Cf. Tanner on this distinction (*Jesus, Humanity*, 46-52).

sustaining of participation of humans in the Son's otherness establishes the *free subjects* which become the focus of the *governance* of the Father (envisionment of the whole and "*aheadness*"; Bauckham: God 'above us'). The Father guides and governs the humans maintained as sons/daughters by the Son and the Spirit. These appropriations have limits, but they illustrate the way in which a trinitarian model of providence instantiates humans as free participants in God's kingdom community.

Once it is accepted that the Trinity comes (all at once) to humans as the differentiated unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, then one might further argue that a trinitarian, Communicative Theism model, for example, respects human dignity and otherness, precisely in the Father addressing us through the Word (objective structure) and Spirit (subjective enabling--to hear and respond). This is a definitively divine and trinitarian communication and self-communication, because Father, Son and Holy Spirit are equally God. And just because it is a trinitarian model of communication it is a *differentiated* mode of communication which respects and *requires* human personal distinction and *otherness* from God. It therefore also requires some form of human freedom which reflects the freedom of the Son to be addressed by the Father, and in turn to respond to the Father. Whether this model is worked out in terms of volitional or libertarian freedom, the human participant in the triune communicative act is no more an automaton than is the Son in both being spoken by the Father and in being addressed by the Father. It is through participating in this kind of personal relationship that humans can be said to *interact* with God. And insofar as humans constitute real 'others' for God, so also the freedom with which they are graced comes to be a feature of that relationship which shapes and characterises the divine-human community as one involving *personal* relationships.

A trinitarian structure of human freedom, therefore, as underwritten by a trinitarian doctrine of providence, provides a concrete locus for working out the *meaning* of human choices as these shape individual and corporate *histories*. Just as Moltmann approached the theodicy question not by asking, Why is there evil, but rather by asking, What is God doing about the problem of evil, so here one can begin by asking, What structure for the choices I make in life has God provided which will give those choices significance and meaning? In the suggestion put forward here, the answer focuses initially not so much on the nature of the freedom involved as it does



on the *location* and *possibility* of that freedom as underwritten by the trinitarian acts of creation, providence, redemption and consummation.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, pansyntheism, as the MODEL of divine-human community achieved through the divine work of loving providence, encompasses the doctrines of creation, redemption and consummation. The element of redemption focuses on Christ as God with us, and as such the narrative of his incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection forms the hermeneutical key for a theology of providence. It is the critical point of epistemic access to the meaning of the whole creation-consummation story. As the supreme illustration of the divine trinitarian love, this act of incarnation and redemption by the Son also enables the completion of creation, the establishment of the Sabbath of the Kingdom of Glory in which God's love will be experienced as fully ubiquitous, and as differentiated and unified as is the life of the Trinity itself.

Pansyntheism also embraces a holistic and (qualified) relational metaphysics, is able to speak to ecological concerns, and understands the triune God as the source of the structure in which providence is worked out.

The range of issues it embodies constitutes it as a comprehensive context of meaning. It allows for both human histories (narratives) and divine history. Moreover, it allows these two stories to interact with each other. The possibility of human community with God can only be actualised as each relationally-constituted individual cooperates with what he or she knows about God. It is especially at this point that the concept of 'communicative theism' becomes important as a model of divine action. The fact that the triune God is intimately and lovingly present to and for all aspects of human life, and that this presence is governed by the goal of establishing divine-human community, establishes the possibility for all of life to be transfused with power for the present, and hope for ultimate fulfilment.



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